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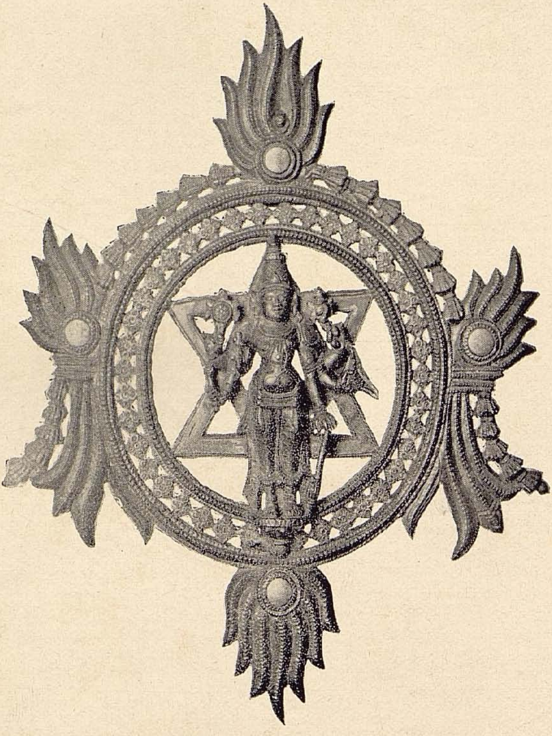
EDITORIAL PREFACE

> Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

No section of the population of India can afford to neglect her ancient heritage. The treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and beauty which are contained in her literature, philosophy, art, and regulated life are too precious to be lost. Every citizen of India needs to use them, if he is to be a cultured modern Indian. This is as true of the Christian, the Muslim, the Zoroastrian as of the Hindu. But, while the heritage of India has been largely explored by scholars, and the results of their toil are laid out for us in books, they cannot be said to be really available for the ordinary man. The volumes are in most cases expensive, and are often technical and difficult. Hence this series of cheap books has been planned by a group of Christian men, in order that every educated Indian, whether rich or poor, may be able to find his way into the treasures of India's past. Many Europeans, both in India and elsewhere, will doubtless be glad to use the series.

The utmost care is being taken by the General Editors in selecting writers, and in passing manuscripts for the press. To every book two tests are rigidly applied : everything must be scholarly, and everything must be sympathetic. The purpose is to bring the best out of the ancient treasuries, so that it may be known, enjoyed, and used.



SUDARŚANA: VISHNU'S DISCUS

(From a bronze in the Madras Museum)

THE HERITAGE OF INDIA SERIES

HYMNS OF THE ĀḶVĀRS

BY

J. S. M. HOOPER, M.A. (Oxon.)
(*late Scholar of Corpus Christi College, Oxford; Principal of Wesley College, Madras*)

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TO THE MEMORY

OF

R. M. H.

MARCH 4TH, 1878—MARCH 21ST, 1918

PREFACE

It has not been easy to decide the principle on which to select from the large amount of material available in the Hymns of the Āḻvārs. It would have been comparatively simple to choose nothing but pieces naturally attractive, an anthology of the best according to a Western literary standard; but it has seemed to me more valuable to attempt to convey an impression of other elements which have not so frequently found their way from Indian languages into English. This is one of the reasons for including the very difficult *Tiruppallāṇḍu*, and for giving what would otherwise appear disproportionate space to the last two selections —the *Tiruppāvai* and the *Tiruviruttam*—which are sufficiently long to give the Western reader a consecutive view of the qualities of the hymns and of the type of devotion fostered by them. The stanzas are numbered throughout as in the original Tamil.

A metrical form, rather than prose, has been chosen for most of the translations, because it appears to me that the strong emotional element in the hymns is better brought out in verse than in prose. But no attempt has been made to reproduce the metres of the original Tamil, which are altogether foreign to English ears, and the actual forms used have no relation to any Tamil verse forms.

Among those to whom I am under obligations in connection with this little book, I would specially refer to Dr. J. N. Farquhar, the planner of the 'Heritage of India' series. It was at his instance that I undertook this work, and his zeal

and encouragement made me continue it under conditions of considerable difficulty. To my friend Dr. Edward Thompson, of Oxford, I am indebted for a number of criticisms and suggestions on the verse forms, of which I have tried to take advantage. M.R.Ry. A. Gōvindāchārya Svāmin, of Mysore, very kindly read through much of the work in manuscript, and placed at my disposal some very interesting MS. notes that are in his possession, on the *Tiruviruttam*. My friend, M.R.Ry. S. Vasudēvāchāriār, B.A., L.T., Bursar of Wesley College, Madras, has most kindly read through the proofs, and by his intimate knowledge of the subject has saved me from a number of errors. I am also indebted to the Superintendent of the Madras Museum, for his courteous permission to reproduce the pictures which add so greatly to the interest of the book.

Madras, J. S. M. HOOPER.
April, 1929.

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PART I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE STUDENT of Hindu popular religion never sees the heart of it, never even sees that it has a heart, unless he has felt something of the thrill that so deeply stirs his devout Hindu friend when in some great festival the god passes by, or when he catches the glimpse of a shrine made sacred by the eager aspiration of many thousands. Religion, for most men in India as in the West, is weakest where it is merely intellectual, and without emotional sympathy the comparative study of religion must fail.

This emotional religion in India—the 'religion of the common man'—has fed itself chiefly on the stories of the *avatāras* of the god Vishṇu, and especially on those of Rāma and Kṛishṇa. The centre of devotion has been God revealed to men in his grace, in one or other of these forms. No detail of their varied careers but has been pondered with infinite longing, and seen to reveal that grace. 'To protect the good, to destroy the evil,'[1] God has come time and again, and his mighty works are made known, to stimulate that passion of devotion which lifts a man into divine fellowship. Under this inspiration, over a thousand years ago, the Āḻvār singers swept through South India with a flame of devotion to God, conceived in personal forms; their hymns were the means of a great revival of popular religion, whose effects spread through the whole of the land. Behind it, conscious or unconscious, lay a philosophy, which in Rāmānuja's hands was to join issue with the Vedānta as interpreted by Śaṅkarāchārya. But the philosophy is sufficiently in the background in many of the hymns for them to become the treasure of the common man.

The Āḻvārs occupy an important though neglected place on the main line of the development of the *bhakti*

[1] *Gītā* iv, 8.

movement in India. In that movement a few great names stand out: the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Rāmānujāchārya, and the founders of the later sects in North India which owe their inspiration to him, may be taken as the landmarks, so far as the Vaishṇavite movement is concerned; while on a line of its own, owing its inspiration very largely to the *Gītā*, but directing its devotion to Śiva rather than to Vishṇu, is the Śaivite bhakti movement, with its hymns of the *Dēvāram* and the *Tiruvāchakam*. Bhakti itself, the attitude of fervent devotion to God, may of course be found wherever men turn in eagerness of desire, or in extremity of despair, away from themselves and their own reasonings to the One; but the historical student has to be content with such references to this attitude and experience as he can find in literature and ritual.

Thus, before the *Gītā*, it has been pointed out that in the Vedas, the grace of Varuṇa already provides the ground for such loving devotion as is later to find expression in the bhakti movement. In the later literature of the Brāhmaṇas (? 800–500 B.C.) Vishṇu, though only one of many gods, already has something of the attractiveness that marks the sun-gods in many mythologies. It is significant that if there is any error in the ritual of sacrifice, it is Vishṇu who is invoked. In the ritual of marriage, too, he has an important place, and thus comes near to man in the most intimate and friendly relations of life. By far the most important reference to Vishṇu in this connection is the legend which was later to find a place as the story of one of the ten avatāras of Vishṇu—the legend of how he, when all the other gods were helpless, redeemed the earth from the Asuras. He was the dwarf Vāmana who was contemptuously offered as much of the earth as he could compass in three strides. Straightway he swelled to the form of Tri-Vikrama, and with his first step bestrode the earth, with a second the highest heaven, and then failing to find a place for the third stride, he placed his foot on the head of Bali, the king of the demons. Vishṇu thus stands out from among his fellow-gods as the one who actually *did* something for the redemption of the world, the one upon whose grace, therefore, man

has some right to count. How far this view of Vishṇu was coherently held in the days before the appearance of the *Gītā* is a question that would carry us far beyond the scope of our present study; but in any case the *Gītā* took this belief and gave it literary form and a more philosophical background.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* (200 B.C.–A.D. 200), whatever the sources from which it sprang, is for all practical purposes the source of the bhakti movement in India. It contains elements philosophically irreconcilable with one another, and inconsistent with what are commonly held to be the fundamentals of Indian thought, but from the first its position has been sure; it speaks to the heart of man, and offers salvation to all the four castes on terms that are readily understood. Its teaching has been used to buttress many later theories of God and the universe, but for the purpose of our enquiry it will be enough to point out three or four lines laid down in it, which the later bhakti movement has steadily followed.

In the first place, it takes the Absolute, the Brahman-Ātman of the *Upanishads*, and identifies it with Vishṇu, one of the gods of the pantheon, hitherto at most on a level with Brahmā and Śiva. Vishṇu and the Absolute are now convertible terms, and the Absolute becomes a gracious and, to some extent, knowable God. In the second place, it takes the warrior Kṛishṇa, who has hitherto been at most a partial incarnation of Vishṇu, and makes him a full incarnation; he that has seen Kṛishṇa has seen Vishṇu, has seen the Absolute. In the third place, it lays down as a way of release from rebirth (which release remains throughout the goal of religious endeavour; though in the work of the Āḻvārs, as we shall see, there are hints of another possible goal), a method that is open to all. The Way of Knowledge, *Jñāna Mārga*, as prescribed in the *Upanishads*, is recognised as effective, but it is obviously limited to the few. The Way of Works, *Karma Mārga*, is recognised, and if prescribed duties are done without desire for reward, and without attachment to the fruits of the action, release will come. But as effective as either of them is the new Way of Devotion to Kṛishṇa,

Bhakti Mārga. Those who have followed the Bhakti Mārga have contemplated the attractive figure of Kṛishṇa, and from many sides devotion has been lavished on him. He has made his appeal to the devout and to the sensuous alike, and in the love of Kṛishṇa, time and space, sin and rebirth, have alike been forgotten. This has been a sufficient gospel for many eager souls; but to those who have enquired how this comforting message can be reconciled with the Upanishad doctrine of an impersonal, actionless Absolute, the *Gītā* has had no satisfactory answer to give. The two conceptions are left side by side: the thinker, in the main, has been content to take the Upanishad doctrine as the food of his mind, while he has found emotional satisfaction in paying homage to a god incarnate, come to earth to help man in his need; he has tried not to notice the dissidence; while for the ordinary man the emotional satisfaction has been everything.

It was not until many centuries had passed that in Rāmānuja the bhakti movement found a competent philosophical exponent. He attempted what to some appears the impossible task of reconciling in thought the conception of the impersonal Absolute and the gracious Helper of men; and he succeeded in the *Viśishṭādvaita* philosophy which he formulated, in providing the strongest alternative to the philosophy of Śaṅkarāchārya which has been allowed to retain the reputation of orthodoxy. From Rāmānujāchārya, as from a reservoir into which earlier streams had poured, the many subsequent bhakti movements branch out again, some with more of emotion, some with less; but all alike in accepting as substantially true his theory of the relation between God and man and the universe.

The work of the Āḻvārs falls into its place between the *Gītā* and Rāmānuja. The Āḻvārs provided the soil out of which Rāmānuja's teaching naturally sprang, and in which later it could bear fruit. He is not really (as has been erroneously asserted) the 'morning star' of the bhakti movement; that is a name far more fitly given to the Āḻvārs; but in him, bhakti shines in the full splendour of a great philosophical exposition. The Āḻvārs in their hymns assume the

position of the *Gītā* with regard to Vishṇu and Kṛishṇa, and in the type of devotion which they represent and stimulate they maintain bhakti as the great way of salvation.

The period during which they appear to have flourished is that in which South India made its chief contributions to the religious life of the country. From the seventh to the ninth centuries of the Christian era, not only they, but also the curiously parallel Śaivite singers, emphasised bhakti, while at the same time (A.D. 788–850) Śaṅkarāchārya was enunciating the Advaita philosophy, with its relentless emphasis on an Absolute without attributes, and the unreality of all manifestation. The bhaktas, holding a view ultimately inconsistent with this, were continually drawn away into this pantheistic position, and in their hymns we can trace the same inconsistency as is to be noted in the *Gītā* itself.

Before giving some account of the Āḷvārs and their work, it will be well to consider briefly some of the other elements in the religious atmosphere which they breathed. We have seen that the thought of the *Gītā* was one of the chief elements, but there was also in the early centuries the strong influence of the Buddhist and Jain movements. For our purpose it is not necessary to treat these separately. Both appear to have been in the nature of reactions against the attributeless Absolute by those who felt that if such be the Supreme Being, practical atheism is the only logical conclusion for men to come to. Both were strongly ethical and offered a way of salvation open to all, as distinguished from the narrow limits imposed by Hindu orthodoxy. The critical note was also struck by Buddhism and Jainism, and in this respect they opened the way to the later reform movements. There are two other respects in which they may be said to have prepared the way for the bhakti movement: (1) they used the vernaculars, and thus made a direct and successful appeal to the masses, a course in which they were followed by both the Śaivite and the Vaishṇavite bhaktas; and (2) they so completely moralised religion, excluding from it all the emotional glow that comes from devotion to God, and making it a matter of pure ethical

teaching, that the hungry human heart was ready to turn to a religion that would give it someone to love and worship.

There was also the Advaita philosophy, dominant then and dominant still in Indian thought; but here it is only necessary to touch on two or three of the points in which it is particularly related to our subject. According to it the Way of Deliverance is the Way of Knowledge, for only so can the bondage of ignorance, producing the illusion of reality, be removed. Through ignorance comes rebirth, and man and god alike are bound by *Karma*; all action works itself out with impersonal justice, and there is no room for anything else. Thus bhakti, in any really valuable sense, is impossible, both because the Supreme Being is without attributes, unknowable, unapproachable, unapproaching, and because of this reign of impersonal retributive law. Bhakti involves a mutual relationship of love and trust, a relationship which to be valuable must be between the human soul and the One with whom finally we have to deal. But the utmost that is allowed in the Advaita system, and the *Upanishads* as expounded by it, is that Vishṇu is a special form of the Absolute, worship of whom may be permitted as a concession to human weakness, until with full knowledge this illusion also disappears, and the One is all and in all. It is clear that a bhakti regarded thus from the superior elevation of philosophic enlightenment holds its position by a very insecure tenure; and it is this that bhakti has had to contend with, and from this that the Viśishṭādvaita philosophy aimed to deliver it. The philosophy, implicit in much of the work of the Āḷvārs, and explicit in Rāmānuja, maintains the personal existence of the Supreme Being, and emphasises his love and pity for the sinful beings who adore him. He is able to grant them an abode of eternal bliss in conscious communion with himself; while God alone exists and all else is manifestation, that manifestation (because God is immanent in it) is real and permanent, though subject throughout to the control of the one Brahman. These permanent and real attributes are 'chit' (individual souls) and 'achit' (matter). They are incapable of existing alone, and so do not interfere with the non-duality of the Absolute. They find their real existence in association with God.

Side by side with philosophy was the practice of polytheistic worship. The remote Absolute of the philosophers was clearly ill-suited to satisfy the craving of human affection for a god near at hand, and, perhaps even less, the imperative need of a god who could still the disorder of human fear. Hinduism as it developed tolerated, as of at least temporary value, the aboriginal cults in which men had found some satisfaction for these needs, and thus we find an increasing number of local legends of the gods incorporated into Hinduism through the *Purāṇas*, and attached to the greater gods of the pantheon. In particular, from the standpoint of this study, is to be noted the movement associated with the Pāñcharātras in the early centuries A.D. This was among the higher castes, and emphasised the worship of Vishṇu in temples and by means of images, with an ancient non-Vedic ritual. It marked a great advance on indiscriminate polytheism, in that it insisted on all worship being directed to Vishṇu; even the other gods of the pantheon were excluded, Nārāyaṇa (identified with Vishṇu) the primal cause, alone being the object of worship. This sect was for these reasons criticised as unorthodox; but it has always claimed orthodoxy, and has maintained caste and the observance of Vedic forms in domestic worship.

Mention must also be made of the similar cult of Śaivism exercising at approximately the same time a very profound influence in South India. The two movements were directed towards rival gods, and to that extent were obviously rivals, and at times even enemies of each other; but, from another standpoint, they were most potent allies, both making a popular religious appeal through the use of the vernaculars, both insisting on an exclusive devotion to one god, and emphasising his grace, on the one hand, and the privilege of man's loving devotion, on the other.

In the Āḻvār hymns there are references to all these types of religion and thought, and it is impossible to appreciate the emphasis of the hymns without remembering the conflict in the midst of which they were produced

There are three main sources of our knowledge of the Āḻvārs. First, the legendary lives of the saints; these are,

at the earliest, contemporary with Rāmānuja, and are therefore some centuries later than the events they profess to relate, so that they cannot be relied upon if contemporary evidence contradicts them. They are, nevertheless, of great interest as being among the earliest attempts at the writing of history in South India. It is significant that they come when personal contributions begin to be made to religion; hitherto Indian religion had in the main gone its way with no outstanding names but that of Buddha; it had been an evolution of thought rather than a succession of prophets; but now the devotion of disciples was anxious to preserve every detail of the life and teaching of the revered *guru*, and these lives are the result. They obviously contain a large admixture of imagination, but they represent thought which was current in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and which is current to-day among devout Śrī-Vaishṇavas.

In the second place there are contemporary inscriptions on stone or metal. The study of these by competent epigraphists is yielding valuable results, and will increasingly serve to check conclusions reached by other means.

In the third place, there is literary evidence gathered from the surviving works of the Āḷvārs themselves, as embodied in the collection of their hymns known as the *Nālāyira Prabandham*—the Collection of Four Thousand. These Tamil hymns were gathered together by Nāthamuni, (d. A.D. 920) who also made arrangements for their use in temple worship. The hymns contain evidence of great value for the subject matter of devotion; but the data for establishing chronology are scanty and have hitherto been insufficiently explored for full agreement between scholars to have been reached. The field of disagreement has been narrowed down; but how wide it has been may be judged from the fact that while the traditional dates for the Āḷvārs are 4203–2706 B.C. the first estimates of western scholarship placed them subsequent to Rāmānuja, who died in A.D. 1137. Caldwell, Śeshagiri Sāstri, Monier Williams, and even the article in the latest edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* are all agreed on the later date. Apart, however, from those who cling to the traditional dates, there is now agreement that

the Āḻvārs were *predecessors* of Rāmānuja, and the differences of opinion are only as to their relative positions, and as to the period to which the earliest of them belong. Professor S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar appears inclined to place the four earliest Āḻvārs in the second century A.D.; but in the judgment of the present writer the evidence for this is lacking, and a considerably later date, the middle of the seventh century, must be assigned to them. The late Mr. T. A. Gopinātha Rao has pointed out that one of the early Āḻvārs, Bhūtattāḻvār, makes reference to Māmallai as the place of his birth. This is clearly Mahābalipuram (The Seven Pagodas), established as a seaport by the Pallava king, Narasiṁhavarman I, surnamed Mahāmalla, in the middle of the seventh century. This carries with it a later date for Bhūtattāḻvār and his contemporaries, Pey Āḻvār and Poykai Āḻvār. In the chronology that is here adopted, Gopinātha Rao has been followed, though it has not been thought necessary to give the detailed evidence that he brings in support of his conclusions. In any case the chronology is so disputed that in this introduction no theories are based upon its details, and no attempt is made to trace any progression of thought from the earlier to the later.

As to the main order of the Āḻvārs, there is very general agreement that the traditional account may be followed. The first three Āḻvārs are PEY ĀḺVĀR, BHŪTATTĀḺVĀR, and POYKAI ĀḺVĀR, and their story illustrates the meaning of the name 'Āḻvār' that all these devotees have in common; the Āḻvār is one who has gone deep in the knowledge of God, one who is immersed in the contemplation of him. Pey Āḻvār, according to the tradition was born in a red lotus in a well in Mylapore. On the same day, a few miles to the south, at Mahābalipuram, was born Bhūtam, also in a flower, while the day before saw the birth of Poykai in a lotus in the tank of the Vishṇu temple at Kāñchi (Conjeevaram). It chanced that one night each of them was weather-bound, and they took shelter one after the other in a space all too small for them. As they stood thus close together to escape the fury of the rain they became conscious of another Presence squeezing in among them. It was God Himself; and when the day came, each of them

broke into ecstatic song, the result of which we have in the first, second and third *Tiruvandādi*, each containing a hundred stanzas and composed respectively by Poykai, Bhūtam and Pey.[1]

Contemporary with these is TIRUMAḺISAI ĀḺVĀR, born three months after them in the village of Tirumaḻisai, near Poonamallee. He was the son of a *ṛishi* and an *apsarā*, but was early abandoned by his mother, and found and brought up by a devout man of low caste.[2] He is reputed to have lived for 4,700 years and to have spent much time in Triplicane, Conjeevaram and Kumbakonam. His hymns are the *Nān-Mukham Tiruvandādi*, containing 96 stanzas, and the *Tiru-Cchanda-Viruttam*, containing 120 stanzas. They contain an interesting and superior reference to Jains, Buddhists, and Śiva Bhaktas.[3]

The next name is that of NAMMĀḺVĀR, the greatest, most famous and most voluminous of the Āḻvārs. He is known by various other names, the most frequent of which are Saṭhagopan and Parānkuśam. His story is closely interwoven with that of another Āḻvār, his disciple, MATHURAKAVI. Nammāḻvār was born in a Śūdra family at Kurukūr, now Āḻvārtirunagari in the Tinnevelly District. For the first sixteen years of his life, the child, at that time called Māṛan, remained under a tamarind tree, opening neither his mouth nor his eyes. Meanwhile Mathurakavi, who was on pilgrimage in North India, saw a great light shining

[1] The opening stanzas of the First and Second *Tiruvandādi* are as follows:

'The earth as lamp-bowl, the poured-out sea as oil, the burning sun as light, I have twined a garland of words for the feet of him who wields the red blazing discus, that the destruction-bringing discus may be gone'—Poykai.

'With love as lamp-bowl, desire as oil, mind melting with bliss as wick, with melting soul I have kindled the bright light of wisdom in the learned Tamil which I have wrought for Nārāyaṇa'—Bhūtam.

[2] cf. *Tirucchanda Viruttam*, 90: 'I was not born in one of the twice two castes: I am not learned in the four sacred Vedas; I have not conquered the five senses . . . save thy shining feet alone, O Lord, I have no other hold.'

[3] *Nān-Mukham Tiruvandādi*, 6: 'Jains are ignorant, Buddhists have fallen into delusion, Śaivas are ignorant innocents, and those who will not worship Vishṇu are low indeed.'

in the South, and guided by it he came to Kurukūr and the tamarind tree. By asking a conundrum he succeeded in rousing Māṛan from his meditative trance, and immediately attached himself to him as his disciple. At the same time Māṛan experienced a revelation of Vishṇu, and the result was the mass of poetry which is preserved in the *Nālāyira Prabandham*. His works are the *Tiruviruttam*, containing 100 stanzas; the *Tiruvāsiriam*, 7 stanzas; the *Periya Tiruvandādi*, 87 stanzas; and the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, 1,102 stanzas. The last forms the whole of the fourth (and concluding) main division of the *Prabandham*, and is itself divided into ten parts, called 'Tens,' each containing ten poems, almost all of them with eleven four or eight line stanzas, the eleventh being to show the eternal benefits that will accrue to those who sing these hymns. The *Tiruvāymoḻi* is by far the best known part of the *Nālāyira Prabandham*. The works of Nammāḻvār as a whole are held to contain the essence of the four Vedas. Unlike some of the other Āḻvārs, the whole of his life was devoted to meditation on divine truth. His disciple, Mathurakavi, has left ten stanzas only, in praise of his master; he is the great example of that devotion to the guru as himself a partial incarnation of Vishṇu, which was in some later developments of the bhakti movement to have such dangerous implications. The date that modern scholarship assigns to Nammāḻvār is about the first half of the ninth century.

Kulasēkara Āḻvār was a king in Travancore, and his poems contain a number of place-references that have been made the ground of various conflicting theories as to his exact date. Probably the first half of the ninth century may be accepted. He was a capable ruler, but his interests gradually turned to religion. He made a careful study of sacred literature and himself compiled an anthology of poems drawn from it. His religious pre-occupations proved increasingly embarrassing to his ministers, and various incidents are related of his absorption. On one occasion he was so moved on hearing a passage read from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāma is pictured as standing alone against hosts of giants, that he ordered out his own troops to go to the rescue, and his ministers needed considerable

ingenuity to avoid complications. Again, he was impetuously on his way to Ceylon to rescue the captive Sītā, and had already plunged into the sea to swim the Straits, when Rāma appeared in person with Sītā to assure him that his help was no longer needed. Other stories are told of his devotion; but at last he abdicated and was then able to gratify to the full his desire to visit the sacred shrine of Śrīraṅgam, and from there to pay visits to other temples. His experiences are embodied in the *Perumāl Tirumoḻi*, containing 103 stanzas.

PERIYĀḺVĀR, also known as Vishṇu-chittar, was born of Brahmin parents at Śrīvilliputtūr. He was a man of natural piety and devoted himself to the supplying of flowers daily to Kṛishṇa in the form of the Sleeper on the Banyan Leaf, in the Śrīvilliputtūr temple. In a vision he was instructed to go to the court of the Pāṇḍya king, Vallabha Dēva, at Madura, and there in a council of sages, summoned by the king to expound the Vedānta, he earned the title of 'Pattar-pirān'—the Brahman chief. On his return he experienced so strong an emotion of love for Vishṇu, and so vivid a realisation of him, that he broke into the song of praise known as the *Tiruppallāṇḍu*, in which he summons others to join him. He returned to his service at Śrīvilli-puttūr, and there composed his *Tirumoḻi*, on the exploits of Kṛishṇa, to whose imitation he devoted himself till the end of his days. He may be placed about the middle of the ninth century.

ĀṆḌĀḶ is of peculiar interest as the one woman poet among the Āḻvārs. She was the reputed daughter of Periyāḻvār, who, however, had found her in his flower garden while he was digging, and brought her up as his own child. One day in his absence she was playing with the flowers he had set aside for Kṛishṇa, and decked herself with them. He rebuked her severely, and was grieved that on that day he was unable to present his usual offering to the god. In a vision, however, he was told that the god preferred the flowers that Āṇḍāḷ had worn; and henceforth she always wore them before they were presented to the deity. She became inflamed with passion for Kṛishṇa, and pictured herself as one of the *gopis*, seeking for union with him by every

TOṆḌARAḌIPPOḌI ĀḺVĀR

(From a bronze in the Madras Museum)

means. She composed the *Tiruppāvai* in thirty stanzas, describing the way of fulfilment of a sacred vow for the realisation of the divine presence. She also composed the *Nācchiyar Tirumoḻi* (the Sacred Speech of the Queen) in 143 stanzas, consisting of invocations to Kāma, the god of Love, etc. The question of her marriage arose; and in a vision it was revealed that she was to be the bride of Śrī Raṅganātha himself, i.e., Vishṇu in the recumbent form shown at Śrīraṅgam. She went to Śrīraṅgam with due ceremony, and was there absorbed into the divine being.

TOṆḌARAḌIPPOḌI was born at Maṇḍaṅguḍi. His original name was Vipra Nārāyaṇa, and like Periyāḻvār, he gave himself to the preparation of flowers for the worship of the god, in this case at Śrīraṅgam. The crisis of his life came when he yielded to the seductions of a courtesan called Dēvādēvi. He was under her spell for some time, and was at last saved only by the intervention of the god Raṅganāthan himself. Thus saved and shocked into a more complete devotion, Vipra Nārāyaṇa returned to his former service of the god, and gave himself the new name of Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi (The Dust of the Feet of the Slaves of God). The heights of his religious experience find expression in his two poems, the *Tirumālai* (the Sacred Garland) and the *Tiruppaḷḷi Yeḻuchi* (the Rousing of the Lord) both directed to the same manifestation of the recumbent Raṅganāthan at Śrīraṅgam. He shows strong hostility to Buddhists and Jains, and there is one hostile reference also to Śaivas. He also may be dated about the middle of the ninth century.

TIRUPPĀṆ ĀḺVĀR was found in a paddy field in Uraiyur (now Woriur, Trichinopoly) and adopted by a childless Pāṇār, or lute-player, and his wife. The child grew up with a deep devotion to Vishṇu as manifested at Śrīraṅgam, just across the river Kāvēri; but conscious of his lowly Pañchama origin, he contented himself with singing his praises from the southern bank of the Kāvēri, not crossing to the sacred island itself. There he used to stay, adoring, and altogether unconscious of his surroundings. On one occasion the Brahmin, Lōka Sāraṅga Mahā Muni, who was responsible for bringing the water for the ablutions of the god, wished

to draw water from the place where Tiruppāṇ was seated, and called to him to remove himself, in order that his out-caste presence might not be a pollution. Tiruppāṇ heard nothing, till at last the Brahmin in his irritation threw a stone at him. Tiruppāṇ at once realised the situation and humbly withdrew. The Brahmin proceeded to draw the water and in due course presented it to Śrī Raṅganāthan. To his intense surprise it was rejected, and the god rebuked him angrily for his treatment of the outcaste, who was his devotee. Finally, Mahā Muni was instructed to go to Tiruppāṇ and carry him on his shoulders to the sacred presence, as Tiruppāṇ's modesty would not allow him of his own motion to bring what he regarded as the defilement of his person near to the god. This was done, and the ecstatic experience drew from Tiruppāṇ the *Amalan-ādi-pirān* in ten stanzas, He was finally absorbed into the divine form at the age of fifty.

Last and most picturesque of the Āḷvārs comes TIRUMAṄGAI, born in the thief caste, his father being commander of the armies of the Chōḷa king. The name Nīla (blue) was given to the child in honour of Vishṇu. He inherited his father's position, and was made a sub-king of the Tiru-vāḷi country; he was thus able to indulge his turbulent passions to the full. His conversion to religious thought dates from his falling in love with a heavenly nymph adopted by a Vaishṇava who gave her the name of Kumuda Valli, as he had found her in a lily pool. Uninfluenced by his offers of jewellery and wealth, she refused to marry anyone but a true Vaishṇava. Nīla immediately hurried to a shrine and begged the deity to make him a Vaishṇava. In answer to his prayer the twelve marks of Vishṇu—the wheel, the conch, etc.—were imprinted on his person, and he thus returned to claim his bride. Kumuda Valli, however, insisted that he should feed 1,008 Vaishṇavas daily for one year. To this also he agreed, and the marriage was duly celebrated. From this point Nīla becomes Tirumaṅgai. He kept his promise to feed the 1,008 Vaishṇavas, though in order to do so he defrauded his overlord, who therefore came against him and made him a prisoner. However, while he was in captivity a hidden hoard was revealed to him

by Varadarājāśvāmi of Kāñchī (Vishṇu in the form worshipped at Conjeevaram), and with this he was able not only to ransom himself but to feed the Vaishṇavas for a considerable time. When it was exhausted he took to highway robbery to procure the requisite money. Nārāyaṇa himself was watching the zeal of Tirumaṅgai for this good end, and in order to win it yet more fully for himself he turned into a wealthy Brahmin traveller and allowed himself to be waylaid and robbed. Tirumaṅgai did his work thoroughly but was unable to lift his rich spoil from the ground until the Brahmin taught him a mantra which contained within itself all the four Vedas. This produced a wonderful effect, and Tirumaṅgai saw the traveller whom he had robbed transformed into Vishṇu in the form of Hrishikēśa, with his consort Lakshmi, riding on the great kite, Garuḍa. Inspired by the sight he produced the hymns which are preserved in the *Prabandham—Periya Tirumoḻi*, *Tirukuruṅ Tāṇḍaham*, *Tiruneḍuṅ Tāṇḍaham*, *Tiruverukutṛirukkai*, *Siṛiya Tirumaḍal*, and *Periya Tirumaḍal*. He visited many sacred shrines, which he celebrated in his hymns. At Sīhāḻi (Shīyāli) he had a debate with the Śaiva saint, Sambandhar, in which he came out victorious, Sambandhar giving him his trident as a sign of respect. (This trident is found on all images of Tirumaṅgai, who is for this reason called Parakalar, the Enemy of Heretics.) At last he reached Śrīraṅgam, where the god, Raṅganāthan, commissioned him to rebuild and enlarge his temple. To secure the necessary funds for this, Tirumaṅgai again resorted to brigandage. He gained possession of half a cargo of nuts by an unscrupulous trick, and proceeded to rob the Buddhist shrine at Negapatam of its golden image of Buddha. In the latter place his brother-in-law, Yatirājan, lost his life, which was however restored to him through the intercession of Śrī Raṅganāyaki, the divine consort at Śrīraṅgam. With the funds so obtained he set about the building work at Śrīraṅgam. When obstreperous workmen demanded payment he saw to their being drowned in the Kāvēri, and consoled their indignant relatives by telling them that they would be happier at the feet of Śrī Raṅganāthan than they had been on earth. . . . And so at last, having obtained as a final boon the vision of the

Lord's ten *avatāras*, he went to Tirukkuruṅguḍi and there passed away. Tirumaṅgai's period is probably the first half of the ninth century.

A study of the hymns of the Āḻvārs brings out two interrelated but distinguishable elements in them: a philosophy striving for expression, and an emotional experience. Both are illustrated in the selections here translated and both may be traced in the subsequent developments of the bhakti movement. One of the most striking features of Śrī-Vaishṇavism is its emphasis on the succession of gurus; it starts with Nammāḻvār, whose immediate disciple, Mathurakavi, himself counted among the Āḻvārs, gives it classic expression. But the main line runs through Nāthamuni, the codifier of the Nālāyiram, and through the āchāryas, Pundarikāksha, Rāmamiśra, and Yāmunāchārya (also known as Āḷavandār, the Victor, on account of his dialectical skill). Yāmunāchārya's works were in Sanskrit, and contained an adumbration of the Viśishṭādvaita system that was worked out by his successor, Rāmānujāchārya (A.D. 1017–1137). It lies outside the scope of this study to give any detailed account of Rāmānuja, but in him is summed up the intellectual side of the work of the Āḻvārs.

On the emotional side no such clear literary succession can be shown; but the suggestion of Dr. Farquhar that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the latest of the *Purāṇas*, dating probably from about A.D. 900, sprang from the midst of some such community as the Āḻvārs,[1] seems highly probable. The kind of bhakti described in the *Purāṇa* is precisely that of the Āḻvārs—a surging emotion produced by gazing on images of Kṛishṇa, singing his praises, meditating on him, associating with other devotees, touching their bodies, serving them lovingly, talking with them of his wondrous doing and his graces. The *Purāṇa* however appears to have gone further in the less worthy directions that are associated with the later bhakti movement than do the Āḻvār hymns. There is more emphasis on the youth of Kṛishṇa, more on the gopis, more detailed sensuous description of the dalliance of Kṛishṇa and the

[1] *Religious Literature of India*, p. 231 f.

gopis, than is to be found in the Āḻvārs. From the standpoint of religion it would appear to mark a perversion, which is by no means so definite in the Tamil works.[1]

The *Nālāyira Prabandham* is one of the great devotional classics of the Tamil country, and there are Śrī-Vaishṇavas, both men and women, who carry the whole of it in their memory, chanting it to simple *rāgams* or tunes, in their private devotions. It is also used in temple worship, side by side with the Sanskrit Veda. Certain portions of the *Nālāyiram* (notably the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* and the *Tiruppāvai*, translated in this selection) are recited daily in all Śrī-Vaishṇava temples, and also on special occasions.[2] For instance, there are special portions appropriate to marriages; and at death, among other portions, the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* is recited, and in the cremation procession the *Tiruviruttam* (here translated in part). At the great Śrīraṅgam temple, near Trichinopoly, the whole of the Prabandham is recited during the ten days of the Ekādaśī festival in January, and also on the Saints' Days sacred to the several Āḻvārs. At Śrīraṅgam and in all Śrī-Vaishṇava temples, the Tamil Prabandham is recited in processions in front of the god, and the Sanskrit Veda behind him. He is there said 'to rest on the Prabandham and to carry the Veda.' For the Śrī-Vaishṇava, this great Śrīraṅgam temple—an enormous enclosure, containing a town within the temple walls—is simply 'Kōyil,' *the* Temple, *par excellence*; and it is here—far more than at Tirupati, which is situated at the extreme north of the Tamil and on the borders of the Telugu country, and which is mentioned in the Hymns only less frequently than Śrīraṅgam—that the 'Tamil Veda,' as the Prabandham is sometimes called, is given full honour. The regular daily worship at Tirupati is mainly in Sanskrit.

Originally, the Hymns seem to have been sung in the

[1] After giving a detailed account of Kṛishṇa's dalliance with the gopis, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* concludes (Book x, chap. 33): 'Whoever respectfully listens to and rehearses the account of the amorous sport of Vishṇu with the damsels of Vraja, conceives great devotion for the almighty lord, and subduing his own self, he speedily destroys his desires that are maladies of the mind.'

[2] See introductory note on the *Tiruppallāṇḍu*, p. 33.

temple-worship, as is still the case in Śaiva temples with Śaiva hymns; but the custom of reciting them together with the commentary gradually grew, possibly to emphasise the similarity between the 'Tamil Veda' and the Sanskrit. This recitation is part of what may be called the 'Tamil liturgy,' as distinguished from the regular liturgy which is in Sanskrit. The singing of some parts of the Prabandham appears to be a comparatively modern revival, and to have no necessary relation to the liturgy. In any case it has no connection with the recitation; where there is a singer, he performs his part alone. The reciters are called 'Aṛaiyār'; they stand on opposite sides of the *maṇḍapam* or hall, in front of the temple, and render the hymns antiphonally. They have allowances and perquisites from the temple, and they must be Brahmins. There is also a liturgy for domestic worship, in which, for Brahmans, Vedic mantras and verses from the Prabandham are both used; for non-Brahmans, the Vedic mantras are of course omitted, though other Sanskrit passages from the *Purāṇas*, etc., may be put in their place. There is no caste restriction as to the domestic use of the Prabandham; it is open to all who accept the teaching of Rāmānuja.

Many hymns of the Prabandham require but little explanation, in order to be intelligible. Instances will be found among those translated here of a simple appeal to God for deliverance from the recurring ill of life—life itself is the ill, not sin, or sorrow, or misfortune; but existence, from which God himself alone may be able to save the soul that trusts in him. Others are filled with a passionate devotion to God, singularly free from self-regard, and expressing itself with a great wealth of illustration. Others again consist of loving and detailed descriptions of God as made known to men, especially in the form of Kṛishṇa, whose exploits both as child and man form the subject-matter of many hymns exalting the grace of God. (Only one of the many dealing in great detail with Kṛishṇa's infancy has been chosen for this selection, by Periyāḻvār.[1]) Others deal similarly with the other avatāras of Vishṇu, and with

[1] See below, p. 37.

particular manifestations at one or other of the many shrines sacred to him, in the Tamil country and beyond it. The note of devotion that sounds in such hymns is a note familiar in the soul's approach to God, and apart from the strangeness of the names and allusions, needs no comment to make it clear to devout men of other races and faiths.

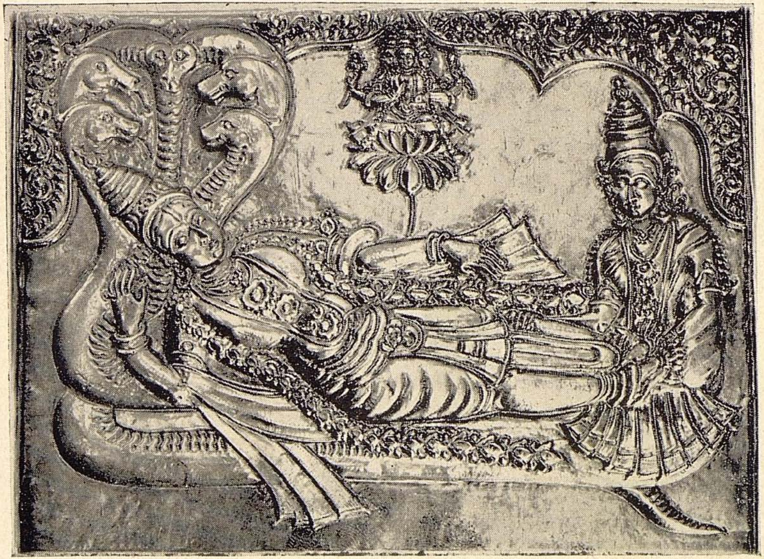
But there are other hymns which refuse to yield their secret unless it is realised that they embody a very elaborate symbolism, much of which is entirely foreign to western thought. In the present selection, the *Tiruviruttam* of Nammāḻvār and the *Tiruppāvai* of Āṇḍāḷ are examples of this class, and an attempt has been made to supply sufficient explanation to make them moderately intelligible to the reader.[1] It is neither possible nor desirable to supply a complete key to the esoteric meaning of these hymns; commentators differ widely on many points, and all that has here been aimed at is to suggest interpretations that may give some clue to the poet's meaning. No epithet is used without a meaning on which commentators have exercised their ingenuity at great length; and inevitably in translation much has been lost of the finer shades of suggestion that the original contains. At the back of all the emphasis on the visible image or shrine lies the great thought, that man's religion not only needs expression through the senses, but through them also needs and receives stimulation. The Āḻvārs yielded themselves fully to the ecstatic raptures that came to their senses through the action of song and symbol. They saw God in everything, and under the most intimate terms known to human relationship they sought to express the passionate hunger of the heart for him. The soul cannot find rest until it finds God.

For those not already familiar with the intricate field of Hindu mythology, one of the chief obstacles to the ready understanding of such devotional hymns as those of the Āḻvārs is the number of incidents and epithets with which they need to be acquainted. Here all that can be given is a brief summary of the main beliefs about Vishṇu, detailed

[1] See below, pp. 49, 58-60.

allusions that are not here made sufficiently clear being explained, where they occur, in the notes to the text. The references in the hymns are very largely to one or other of the avatāras of Vishṇu, and it is through them that he is chiefly known to men. But he himself dwells in Vaikuṇṭha, with his consort, Lakshmi, or Śrī, who was born of the froth of the ocean when it was churned by the gods and demons. On his breast he bears a sacred mark, Śrī-vatsa, and in his four hands he carries always the Wheel, the Conch, the Club, and the Lotus. He is for ever at war with the demons that for ever plot evil against men and gods. Among the demons are Madhu, Kaṁsa, Bāṇa, Bali, all of whom are mentioned in these selections; and Vishṇu hurls his wheel and uses his club against them. When he blows his conch his enemies are filled with terror and dismay. He also has a Bow (Śārṅga) and a sword, and wears special jewels on his breast and on his wrist. He rides on Garuḍa, the great eagle that is half human in form and character, the destroyer of serpents. At the dissolution of the universe, between the intervals of creation, Vishṇu, the Supreme Being, floats on the waters of the Sea of Milk, reclining on Ādi-Śēsha,[1] the thousand-headed serpent, in profound repose, with Lakshmi at his feet. Out of his navel grows the lotus which supports Brahma, the active agent in reproducing the world. Vishṇu's chief quality is his condescending grace, through which he is the protector and preserver of the world. This grace is shown pre-eminently in the avatāras, in which he comes to earth for the help of those who are in need. The number is commonly given as ten, and references to most of them are frequent in the Āḻvār hymns. The first three are associated with the threatened destruction of the earth by flood, Vishṇu coming in animal form to save—first as Matsya, the Fish; then as Kūrma, the Tortoise; and again as Varāha, the Boar. Then comes the Man-lion, Narasiṁha, by which Vishṇu delivers his devotee, Prahlāda, from Hiraṇyakaśipu. In the Vāmaṇa avatāra Vishṇu becomes a

[1] cf. *Poykai Āḻvār* (First Tiruvandādi, 53): 'If he travels, an um brella; if he sits, a throne: if he stands, sandals; within the deep sea , always a raft; a jewelled lamp, fine silk, a couch for embraces, the Sn ake will be for Tirumāl.'



ŚESHAŚAYANAM: VISHṆU RECLINING ON ĀDI-ŚĒSHA

(From a copper embossed plate in the Madras Museum)

dwarf, and by his three strides, as Tri-Vikrama, delivers the earth from the demon Bali. Next comes Paraśurāma, followed by the two great figures of Rāma, whose foe was Rāvaṇa, and Kṛishṇa, who destroyed Kaṁsa. To the other two names, generally included among the ten avatāras, Buddha, and Kalki, who is still to come, it is doubtful if there are any references in the Āḻvārs.

In addition to these stories which are common to all India—and those of Rāma and Kṛishṇa have of course been elaborated in the fullest detail in popular story and imagination—there are stories connected with particular manifestations of Vishṇu or of one or other of his avatāras at various local shrines. The different names by which he is known suggest different attributes; for instance, Raṅganātha of Śrīraṅgam is the Lord of the World-Stage, in the all-embracing repose that precedes creation; while Varadarājāsvāmi of Kāñchī is the Giver of Boons. Many of the poems of the Āḻvārs are in praise of particular shrines and images, and in the selection here given, the groves and pools and streams in the immediate neighbourhood of such temples as that of Venkatēśvara at Tirupati are the subject of loving description. For the ordinary worshipper the image undoubtedly recalled God to memory and stimulated emotion; but the exact relation of the local deity to Vishṇu is not always easy to understand.[1] In images the divine life needs to be induced, in the *prāṇapratisṭhā* ceremony, by means of mantras. Once life is induced there is a god in the image who is to it as the soul is to the body, and who by his loving devotees is roused from slumber and bathed and fed. In the life of Rāmānuja there are two incidents which are of special interest as vividly illustrating the reality of life in each image. In early days the temple at Tirupati appears to have been Bhāgavata, and the image there combines the

[1] Vishṇu exists in five modes: (i) Images and the like are *Archa*; (ii) incarnations are *Vibhava*; (iii) his fourfold manifestations are *Vyūha*; (iv) the internal controller is *Antaryāmin*; (v) the supreme Vāsudeva is *Para*.

By worshipping each of the former embodiments the votary becomes fit to practise the worship of each of the latter.

forms of Vishṇu and Śiva.[1] In order to decide once for all to which god worship was to be given, Rāmānuja one evening placed before the image, on the one hand, the symbols of Vishṇu, (the discus, the shell, and so forth), and on the other Śiva's symbols, (the trident, etc.), so that the god himself might decide. In the morning the god was wearing the symbols of Vishṇu, and from that time forward the temple has been one of the great Śrī-Vaishṇava shrines. Still more interesting and perplexing is the story of the dispute that occurred between Raṅganātha (Vishṇu at Śrīraṅgam), and Varada (Vishṇu of Kāñchi), over Rāmānuja; the one god sent to the other demanding that he should no longer retain Rāmānuja, as he was needed at Śrīraṅgam. Here we are not far removed from indiscriminate polytheism, with the unedifying feuds of rival gods. Yet it is clear that there is a recognised relation between the one Supreme Being Vishṇu and the various local gods, so that loyalty to any or all of them is loyalty to him, while on the other hand, no god outside this ring may receive worship. There are, however, stanzas in the Āḻvār hymns in which it is indicated that worship of Śiva is in reality worship of Vishṇu himself under that form.[2]

In almost all the hymns that are here given, a yearning after the divine fellowship stands out as the chief characteristic. In comparison with this, the best that the world can offer is valueless: wealth, sensual indulgence, the exercise of kingly authority, the bliss of Śvarga itself, are all treated with contempt.[3] It is not a vague absorption into the divine essence that is here desired; it is a personal relationship, illustrated largely by the relation between a man and the woman whom he loves.[4] The object of man's

[1] cf. *Pey Āḻvār* (Third Tiruvandādi, 63) 'The two forms unite as one on the sacred hill (Tirupati), where the rushing mountain streams flow round Māl (Vishṇu), who appears with matted locks, and high top-knot and shining battle-axe and discus, girt with the snake.' cf. also *Poykai Āḻvār* (First Tiruvandādi, 98) 'These two (Śiva and Vishṇu) for ever change and unite in their limbs: the one is ever within the limbs of the other.'

[2] See, e.g., introductory note to *Tiruviruttam*, p. 58.

[3] e.g., selections from *Kulasēkara*, pp. 44–48.

[4] e.g., *Tiruviruttam* throughout.

love is not a neutral abstraction, but Vishṇu, Nārāyaṇa above all. This Supreme Being is known to men in his overwhelming grace in his various avatāras—whether as Boar, or Man-lion, or Dwarf, or Rāma, or Kṛishṇa, always coming to the help of man. And with him always is associated his consort, Lakshmi, or Śrī, the embodiment of his active grace and mercy, the mediatorial influence that is continually with him. The nature of the relationship is beyond definition, but generally its climax is ecstatic joy; the almost hysterical thrill of emotion is the sure evidence of the divine presence: 'When one is overcome by the bhakti exaltation, trembling in every cell of his being he must freely and passively allow this influence to penetrate his being and carry him beyond all known states of consciousness. Never from fear or shame that bystanders might take him for a mad man ought the exhibition of his bhakti rapture that deluges his being to be suppressed. The very madness is the distinguishing character of the enraptured saint, distinguishing him from the ordinary mortals to whom such beatific experience is necessarily denied. The very madness is the bhakta's pride "In that very madness," the saint exhorts, "run, jump, cry, laugh, and sing, and let every man witness it." '[1] Figures drawn from the sex relationship are employed to illustrate this extraordinary exhilaration and, especially in the later developments of bhakti, this became the most dangerous element of the movement. In the Āḻvārs, speaking generally, the erotic expression is not too gross. Another characteristic attempt at illustration (as in much other Vaishṇava poetry) is in the passion of a mother for a child, and some of the most charming of the hymns are those in which the child Kṛishṇa draws out the affection of his devotees in the purest form of emotion that men can know.[2] The emotion of love is stimulated especially by the avatāra stories, and the very points in the story of Kṛishṇa that have been challenged by many critics—his thieving, his im-

[1] Govindāchārya, *Divine Wisdom of the Drāvida Saints* (Introduction p. iii).

[2] cf. the playful poem of *Periyāḻvār* translated on p. 37.

propriety with the gopis—are regarded as but supreme examples of his utter, condescending, grace.

On another line, but aiming at the same end of giddy exhilaration, is the practice of repeating the thousand names of Vishṇu, and so by a kind of self-hypnotism losing oneself in rapture. The true devotee sees God in everything, and again and again in these poems, not only the *tuḷasi* (Vishṇu's peculiarly sacred plant), but trees and flowers, mountains blue in the distance, birds and beasts and human beings serve to recall the heart to its allegiance. There is in these hymns more of unrealised desire than of present satisfaction, and every reminder of God serves to accentuate this pain of the home-sickness of the heart.[1]

This relationship with God by means of loving devotion is the way of escape from the ills of life, and is open to all. Neither asceticism, nor ceremonial works, nor knowledge are required; and such a story as that of Tiruppāṉ Āḻvār is a reminder that a man of any caste may be a guru, and that thus in the sight of God birth is no recommendation. This salvation is generally a personal matter, and there is not a great sense of responsibility for the welfare of others in a number of these hymns. Yet on the other hand it is to be noted that the very use of Tamil opened the way to the common man, and that still in Vaishṇava temples the recitation of the Nālāyiram gives what has been called the essence of the Vedas in the vernacular of the people. The reading of the poems, which is possible for all, we are again and again told, will deliver a man from rebirth. In the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* and in a number of other poems there is a definite call on the part of the poet for others to join with him in his act of worship and in his service of God. The life of Rāmānuja supplies another illustration of the same generous tendency. To learn a mystic secret from a guru in the Madura District he travelled all the way from Śrīraṅgam; but to test his worthiness the guru made him return without the mantra. Eighteen times did Rāmānuja thus make the toilsome journey; until at last the guru, persuaded of his fitness, disclosed the mystery, under a

[1] For examples see *Tiruviruttam, passim.*

strict pledge of secrecy. Immediately Rāmānuja went forth and proclaimed what he had learnt to a group of men, preferring to be lost himself, if he might thus save others.

The goal that is sought appears to vacillate between two alternatives, as indeed is the case with many mystics in every land and age. There is first, quite clearly, the normal human longing for a relation of conscious love and trust between man and God ; there is even the joyful anticipation of unending service round God's throne.[1] The reality and eternity of love can alone save these impassioned hymns from being a mockery, and in the Viśishṭādvaita philosophy the doctrine of the continued existence of the individual soul finds its defence. But there is also the goal of complete absorption, such as is suggested in the stories of Āṇḍāl and of Tiruppāṇ—the peace that is the peace of nescience. Thought seems to be dominated by the ideas of Karma and an impassible God, and the one cry is to be delivered from rebirth.[2] Life itself still seems to be the evil, and not any of the mere incidents of life, such as pain or misery or sin. It is perhaps unwise to look for logical consistency in the expressions of religious rapture ; it is to be found no more in the hymns of the great German mystics than in those of the Āḻvārs.

Whatever the goal, and however varied the means by which man may try to reach it, it is clear that his hope in these hymns lies not in means, however suitable, but in the character of God Himself. In one of the earliest of the Āḻvārs there occurs a stanza which may well be taken as the expression of the bhakta's faith : 'Let thy grace be for me to-day or to-morrow, or let it wait still for a little and come later, I am sure, O Nārāyaṇa, that I am not without thee, nor art thou without me !'[3] God's grace is unlimited ; each avatāra shows it, and supremely in the condescension of Kṛishṇa's whole career, it is made sure for men. On this unlimited grace the humblest and most unworthy may build.

[1] e.g., *Tiruppallāṇḍu*, stanza 12, p. 37.
[2] e.g., Tirumangai, *Periyatirumoḻi* xi, 8, p. 40.
[3] Tirumaḻisai, *Nān-mukhan-Tiruvandādi*, 7.

God's grace is unfathomable, all the wisdom of all the sages has touched but the fringe of the knowledge of him, their best light is only a flickering torch.[1] But such grace demands an unlimited answering devotion, and salvation comes when God's boundless grace is met by man's faith and love. The question that inevitably arises at this point is one of the great questions of the religious life; what is the relation between that grace of God, and the answering faith of man? It is on this that the great division occurred among the followers of Rāmānuja. The Vadagalais, or Northern school, whose great thinker and leader was Vedānta Dēśika, laid stress on man's share; the Tengalais, who are more directly in the line of succession to the Āḻvārs, emphasised God's grace, and God's responsibility, and maintained that all that man has to do is to remain passive. The two sects still divide the field of South Indian Vaishṇavism, with many differences of ceremonial observance and emphasis; but the essential difference is as to whether man's hold of God and God's hold of man are like that of the monkey to its young, where the young one has to exert itself to maintain its grip, or like that of the cat and the kitten, where the kitten is merely passive in its mother's mouth. The Tengalai view lends itself to extravagant exaggerations, as does extreme Calvinism, with a very similar creed; but in the Āḻvār hymns there is little or no evidence of blaming God for man's failures, to the shutting out of all responsibility from man.

God's character then, as here portrayed, is gracious, and his grace is to be answered by man's loving faith. But 'grace' is hardly a sufficient description of character; it is a description of God in his dealings with men. But what is God in himself? In particular, if salvation is eternal fellowship with him, we need to know what manner of being it is with whom we are to maintain fellowship; for this determines the ideal of our own character and life. Now from these hymns it is very difficult to form a consistent view of God's character. What is his attitude to the great problems of conduct which every man has to face? It would almost seem

[1] *Tiruviruttam*, 44, p. 73.

from these hymns that God is above morality, and that to him it is an irrelevance. The Purāṇic stories are taken for granted. Kṛishṇa is a full incarnation of God, expressing God in everything he does. It has been said above that what in an ordinary man would be called his immoralities are regarded in Kṛishṇa as so many signs of his infinite condescension; but if God can so condescend, morality is indifferent to him. Similarly, in the easy theory of partial incarnations in the various Āḻvārs there is no recognition of morality as a requisite. In the symbols at the great Śrīraṅgam temple, as at other temples, there is much of what anywhere else would have to be called indecency; but there is no suggestion that this is repugnant to Vishṇu. Morality is a category applicable only to men; and it is not surprising that in some later developments of the bhakti movement, by a perverted emphasis, the heaven that is held out as the goal of the bhakta consists in sharing in the amorous sports of Kṛishṇa; to be with God means to be freed from the vexatious limitations of humanity. God is at any rate not essentially and centrally righteous; and while it may be true that 'the pure in heart shall see God,' the same result can be attained by other means. Apparently, as the stories of the Āḻvārs suggest, the power of a mantra, the repetition of the sacred name, or even the use of the right ceremonial, are as effective as right living and true thinking.[1] In other words, there is no *necessary* connection between bhakti and character. Such a story as that of Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi certainly emphasises the ethical; but on the other hand is the story of Tirumaṅgai where a startling and profound religious experience left character entirely unaffected; he is at least as unscrupulous after his 'conversion' as before it, and there is no hint of criticism on the part either of Vishṇu or of the later devotees of Tirumaṅgai. Deliverance from sin, after all, is not what is chiefly desired; sin is not the problem, but life itself. It would thus appear that the type of devotion that we are here considering gives no positive help to the living of the moral life; the possession of a character

[1] cf. the closing stanzas of many of the hymns.

formed on the model of God as revealed in his avatāras cannot bar men from that fellowship with him which is salvation. On the other hand, this is inconsistent with the fundamental karmic doctrine, that selfish action involves rebirth and is thus a bar to salvation. Karma thus makes for unselfish, though self-centred, morality; but the bhakta's religion may quite well leave morality on one side. The ethical problem is not central in the thought of the Āḻvārs; the fervent glow of emotion makes all else seem trivial.

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The literature in English dealing with the Āḻvārs is very scanty. The traditional stories of the Āḻvārs, together with much curious information, may be found in *The Holy Lives of the Āzhvārs or the Drāvida Saints* by Alkondavalli Govindāchārya (Mysore, 1902). Of interest, too, is the same author's *Divine Wisdom of the Drāvida Saints*. From the standpoint of modern scholarship T. Rajagopālāchāriar's *Vaishṇavite Reformers of India*, S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar's *Early History of Vaishṇavism in South India*, and T. A. Gopinātha Rao's *Subrahmanya Ayyar Lectures on the History of Srī Vaisṇavas*, are of special value. There are various lives of Rāmānujāchārya. On the more general lines of bhakti, Macnicol's *Indian Theism* is most useful, while Farquhar's *Outline of the Religious Literature of India* is indispensable for the clear view that it gives of the historical development of thought and practice in the bhakti movement, and for its placing of bhakti in relation to the other elements of Indian religious life. For mythology, the standard works on Hinduism are available, and in small compass Wilkins' *Hindu Mythology* is serviceable, though it is doubtful whether in any one English book an account can be found of all the stories which are taken for granted in the Āḻvār hymns. Of bhakti from the Christian standpoint there is a valuable and suggestive treatment in J. L. Johnston's *Some Alternatives to Jesus Christ*. The relevant articles in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* may also be consulted with advantage, especially Grierson on 'Bhakti Marga,' and A. Berriedale Keith on 'Rāmānuja.'

PART II

TRANSLATIONS AND NOTES

TRANSLATIONS AND NOTES

I

A Hymn of Praise

PERIYĀḺVĀR: TIRUPPALLĀṆḌU

Introduction

Among the Āḻvār hymns a unique place is held by the *Tiruppallāṇḍu*. For all Tamil Vaishṇavites, both Vadagalai and Tengalai, the Tamil hymns rank in importance with the Sanskrit Veda and are recited on all occasions of worship, both temple and private. (This of course does not include the morning, mid-day and evening *Sandhya* worship, incumbent on Brahmins as such, which consists of meditation and the recitation of certain set Vedic formulas). At the ten-day annual festivals of the temples, all the four thousand stanzas should be recited; while in the daily worship there is time only for selected stanzas. But in all cases, whether the stanzas recited are many or few, the Tamil recitation is commenced with the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* and is closed with it. This is not confined to Brahmins; Vaishṇavites of all castes make this use of the *Tiruppallāṇḍu*. Among the ceremonies at death, some involve the recitation of Āḻvār hymns; and on the day of death, in the polluting presence of the dead body, the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* is recited. So on the thirteenth day, when all pollution ends, if possible all the four thousand stanzas should be recited, though this involves time and money; but in any case, however few stanzas are recited, the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* is included.

According to the tradition, on one occasion Vishṇu appeared to Periyāḻvār in a vision. The Āḻvār, overwhelmed with the sight of his infinite beauty, burst out into ecstatic prayer, that that beauty should be preserved safe for ever. His prayer is the *Tiruppallāṇḍu*.

The generally accepted scheme of the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* may be described as follows. In stanzas 1 and 2 the Āḷvār sings the praises of God. He does not feel happy to sing alone, and therefore he calls upon others, who reply to him, and finally join with him in singing.

(*a*) In stanza 3 he calls to those who worship God, but do so without any ulterior motive; stanza 6 is their reply, and in stanza 9 he, delighted with it, sings with them.

(*b*) In stanza 4 he calls upon those who worship God, with the object of securing soul-realisation, and who having gained it, forget God, and are content. Stanzas 7 and 10 give their response and the Āḷvār's singing with them.

(*c*) In stanza 5 he calls upon those who worship God, seeking the enjoyment of worldly pleasure, attached to impermanent wealth and power. Stanzas 8 and 11 are their response and the Āḷvār's singing with them.

(*d*) In stanza 12 he appeals to others, who are altogether indifferent to God, and suggests that for them the way to worship God is to join with him in singing this hymn, and that the reward of worship is unceasing worship round his throne.

There is a play on the meaning of the word 'Pallāṇḍu,' which makes adequate translation impossible. The word literally means 'many years,' but it has also the sense of 'adoration.' In the first stanza both meanings are necessary, but for the rest the translation 'All Hail' has been adopted as perhaps the least open to objection.

Translation

1. Reverence, reverence be unto thee, O thou mighty One, who didst overcome the Mallas,[1] thou like to the sapphire in glory!

Infinitely blest be the beauty of thy holy feet for many many years, for thousands of years, for crores of years, for ever!

2. All hail! Oh may no rift come 'twixt thy slaves and thee!
All hail to Srī, who dwells, thy lustre, on thy right!
All hail, the glorious discus in thy fair right hand!
All hail to Pañchajanyam[2] sounding in the fight!

[1] Sent by Kaṁsa against Kṛishṇa.

[2] The conch won in conflict with the demons; this and the discus are Vishṇu's chief weapons.

VISHṆU

(From a stone image in the Madras Museum)

3. Take earth and odours,[1] if to serve the Source of bliss
   Ye wish: but we'll no worldlings have to join our crew!
 Seven generations without flaw, we sing 'All hail!'
   To him who with his army Laṅkā's demons slew!

4. Ere to the evil place[2] ye come,—oh haste,
   Ye who would join us, come, resolve to break these bounds.[3]
 Oh, join the devotees who hymn Nārāyaṇ's name,[4]
   Oh haste, till town and country with your song resounds.

5. Ye who have been among Irudikeśan's[5] slaves,
   The Lord who into one the crowded hosts of yore
 Gather'd and slew, demons and giants: leave the past,[6]
   And hail his thousand names; oh come, his feet adore!

6. For generations seven, grandsire and sire, we do
   Our tasks aright: that we the evil eye may stay[7]
 All hail we sing to Hari, who his demon foe[8]
   At Tiruvōṇam's[9] sacred eventide did slay.

[1] i.e., from the lord, as symbols of becoming his slaves. Earth is taken by devotees to mark the beginning of a ten-day festival, and in it grains are made to sprout.

[2] The reference may be either to primordial matter, or to the burning-ghat; salvation must come while we are in the body.

[3] They are bound in that their mind is set on their own soul, not on God.

[4] Namonārāyaṇa has the surface meaning of 'Salutation to Nārāyaṇa,' but traditionally the meaning is, as handed down from his guru to Rāmānujāchārya, '(I am) not for me . . . but for Nārāyaṇa.'

[5] A name of Vishṇu, 'the lord of the senses' (Hrishikēśa).

[6] The past for these had been spent in singing for wealth, etc.; worship henceforth is to be without any ulterior motive.

[7] God, because of his supreme excellence, is exposed to the evil eye, in the protective thought of his devotees; and their anxious prayer prompted by love has been directed to the warding off from him of its power.

[8] Hiraṇyakaśipū, slain by Vishṇu in the Narasiṁha avatāra.

[9] The twenty-second lunar asterism. There are twenty-seven, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac. It is 'sacred' because Vishṇu is its presiding deity.

7. All of our race will serve, our sign the discus red,
Gleaming more bright than fire, and sing all hail to him,
Lord of the discus, that, from all his thousand arms,
Made flow the blood of Vāṇan[1] in the struggle dim.

8. Him who the hooded snake's dread foe[2] as standard bears,
And even me makes pure in life, I hail! Oh sweet
Were rice and ghi, betel in hand, unceasing rite,
Necklet and ear-ring, sandal for the body meet![3]

9. 'Tis we put on the golden robe thou takest off,
Eat thy bowl's orts, thy tulasi our coronal:
Where thou didst fix our task, 'tis done; now, hail to thee,
Couch'd on thy snake,[4] at Tiruvōṇam festival!

10. Lord, when we call'd ourselves thy slaves, thou mad'st us free,
And we have prosper'd; now to thee who that fair day
Appear'dst, in Mathurā didst break the bow,[5] and leap
On the five-hooded serpent's head,[6] 'All hail!' we say.

11. I, who like Selva proud,[7] of Kōṭṭiyūr, all fair,
With nought unfit, am, Tirumāl, of old thy slave,
Ecstatic sing thee, manifold in purity,
Namonārāyaṇa! thy names, with meaning grave.

[1] Anirudha, enticed by Usha, daughter of Vāṇan, king of the Asuras (Bāṇāśura), secretly gained access to her. Vāṇan dazed him; Kṛishṇa came and rescued him, and married Usha to Anirudha.
[2] Garuḍa.
[3] These were the boons that had previously been satisfying the soul, which now recognises that in God alone is satisfaction.
[4] Ādiśesha. [5] i.e., of Kaṁsa. [6] Kālyan.
[7] A Tirukōṭṭiyūr king who was a devotee.

12. They who repeat these words of Vishṇu Chittar's[1] song
Praising the sacred Lord (Lord of the Bow,[2] on high
In heaven), and feel their luck this year,[3] round God shall throng
And there, 'Namonārāyaṇa!' unceasing cry.

II

Little Krishṇa and the Moon

PERIYĀḶVĀR: TIRUMOḶI: I. 4

The Āḷvār under the figure of Yaśōdā, Kṛishṇa's foster-mother, describes how the child plays in the dust and calls for the moon.

1. He rolls round in the dust, so that the jewel on his brow keeps swinging, and his waist-bells tinkle! Oh, look at my son Govinda's play, big Moon, if thou hast eyes in thy face—and then, be gone!

2. My little one, precious to me as nectar, my blessing, is calling thee, pointing, pointing, with his little hands! O big Moon, if thou wishest to play with this little black one, hide not thyself in the clouds, but come rejoicing!

3. Wert thou bright all over, with the wheeling of thy orb of light, with all thou dost, thou canst not match my son's face! O Moon, come quickly, so as not to tire the hands that beckon thee, of the wondrous one who dwells in Vēngaḍam!

4. 'Tis thee he points to from my hip, he with the discus in his hand, gazing with bright wide eyes! If thou knowest what beseems thee, O Moon, vex him not; if thou art not a childless one thyself, come now!

5. He calls thee in his baby speech, prattle unformed, sweetened with nectar from his pretty mouth. O big Moon, if thou heedest him not, whose name is Śrīdharan,[4]

[1] Another name of Periyāḷvār.
[2] Śārṅgam, Vishṇu's bow.
[3] i.e., they recognise that they are lucky in the time at which they live, that they may thus sing.
[4] 'He who carries Lakshmī in his heart.'

who is so friendly to all, when he calls and calls, 'twere well for thee if thou wert deaf!

6. He who in his great hand wields club, and discus, and bow, doth yawn for very drowsiness—and if he sleep not, the milk he has taken will upset him! So, big Moon, dwelling in the sky, make haste, and come!

7. Despise him not because he is a child; he is the little one who of old slept on the banyan leaf! If he be wroth, he will rise up and leap on thee and seize thee; disregard not my lord, big Moon, but run hither joyously!

8. Scorn not my lion whelp as a little one; go ask King Bali[1] of his youthful prowess. 'Tis great Māl that calls for thee to come quickly. If thou recognisest thy despising him as a fault in thee, O full Moon, even thou wilt be fit to be his slave!

9. See how he calls thee, my Lord, who filled his hands full from the pot, and gorged himself with ghi! There is no doubt that he will slay thee with his discus, so if thou wouldst live, run hither joyously!

III

'Lord, in the fulness of my might
I would for Thee be strong'

TIRUMAṄGAI: PERIYA TIRUMOḺI, I. 3

1. Or ever age creep on us, and we need
The staff's support; ere we are double bent
With eyes fix'd on the ground in front, and feet
That totter, sitting down to rest, all spent:
We would worship Vadari[2]
Home of him who mightily
Suck'd his feignéd mother's breast
Till she died, ogress confest.[3]

[1] It was from King Bali that Vishṇu in the Vāmaṇa avatāra obtained permission to take the three strides, which he did, expanding to the form of Tri-Vikrama.

[2] i.e., Badari, the Himālayan shrine of Vishṇu.

[3] Kṛishṇa in his childhood sucked the breast of the demon, Pūtana till she died.

2. Ere youth can rail, (as with one hand on back
We lean a-tremble on our staff, with eyes
A-roll, and deep heav'd breaths, and coughs)—can say,
'What's this? Why, what an old man Father is!'
We would worship Vadari,
Sung by the honey-drinking bee.

3. Ere all my veins stand out like hoops, my flesh
All loose, my mind ashamed, and tottering
I stand, with rolling eyes turn'd on the path;
If sense I have, the thousand names I'd sing:
I would worship Vadari,
Sung by bees in ecstasy.

4. Before the rheum flows, and my eye grows dim,
And bile comes up, and I am old, and cough,
And my legs pain me and together knock,
And I can walk but tottering—enough!
I would worship Vadari
Girt by pools where fishes play;
Home of the Lad who calves did graze,
And on a day the hill did raise.[1]

9. Ere in my body all my senses fail,
And I grow old and sit apart, my mind
Sunk in dejection; gathered phlegm I spit,
And only babble of the things I find:
I would worship Vadari,
Sung by those who tuḷasī
Bear to wreath him, and round the shrine
Name the thousand names divine.

[1] Kṛishṇa, the cowherd, raised the hill, Govardhana, as an umbrella, to protect the flocks from the rain sent in wrath by Indra.

IV

'*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death*?

TIRUMAṄGAI: PERIYA TIRUMOḺI, XI. 8

1. Like tree that dwells on river bank
    I timid am
Lest in the pit of birth again
    I plungéd am.
Lord, who art smell and taste and touch
And hearing . . . I have dared thus much!

2. Like sailors caught in midst of storm
    I timid am
Lest in the pit of birth again
    I plungéd am.
Lord of the Discus, though my word
Be cause for wrath, let it be heard!

3. Like sharing hut with serpent-mate
    I timid am
Lest into doleful births again
    I plungéd am.
Lord of the lotus eyes, my mind
Confus'd, no way to bear can find.

4. Like ant on firebrand blazing at both ends
    I timid am,
Lest wandering, into changeful births again
    I plungéd am.
I bring to thee my melting heart:
Thou the Eternal Sovereign art!

5. Like pack of jackals caught in flood
    I timid am,
Lest into pit of destined woe
    I plungéd am,

Eternal Sovereign, by thy hand
Thrust in, with all abatement bann'd.

7. The worm within the *neem*[1] eats nought
Save *neem* alone.
Thy rosy feet thy servant I
Will love alone,
Thou Light Supreme, on serpent bed,
Who waning moon deliveréd!

V

'He condescends to them of low estate'

TIRUMAṄGAI: PERIYA TIRUMOḺI, V. 8

1. Thou didst not call him dull, or foe to life,
Or low of caste, but pitiedst him,[2]
On him thy kindly grace didst pour, and say:
'She with the shy deer's modest glance
Thy friend is—and my brother thine'; and when
He would not stay behind, for joy,
'Thou art my friend: stay here!' thou saidst. Such words
So fit my heart that I have found
Thy feet, thou with the colour of the seas,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

2. Thou didst not spurn the great son of the Wind[3]
As Ape, and of another race,
But, so that love and longing greater grew
Than ocean, thou didst love, and say:

[1] The margosa tree. The worm enjoys even the bitter margosa leaf, because that is its environment: how much more must man love God!

[2] The reference is to the episode in the Rāmāyaṇa, when Guhan, the fisherman king, was loath to leave Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmaṇa on the banks of the Ganges. Rāma finally persuaded him not to accompany them when he provided them with a boat to cross the river.

[3] Hanumān, the monkey hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, was the son of Vāyu, the wind.

'There cannot be a recompense for all
That thou hast done for me; I will
Embrace thee, thou of faultless truth!' That such
A shining boon to me may come,
Longing, the refuge of thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

3. When gathering lotus in a beauteous pool
By groves of fragrant flowers girt,
The elephant by mighty crocodile
Was seized, so that its end was nigh:[1]
He thought upon the shelter of thy feet . . .
Knowing the mighty wrath thou hadst,
Such that the life of that beast, cruel-mouthed,
Was shaken, I, too, come to thee,
Thy slave, the refuge of thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

4. When came a poison-dropping angry snake[2]
To Thee for refuge, terror-struck,
Thou didst become its refuge, and didst give
It for protection to the Bird,
Thy beauteous slave. Knowing this grace thou show'dst,
I, fearing Yama's messengers
So harsh of speech, and cruelties which they,
Fierce ones, will do, have come to thee:
Thy slave, the refuge of thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

[1] Both the elephant and the crocodile were such because they had been cursed by munis. The elephant had been the king Indradyumna who was so absorbed by devotion to Vishṇu that he had failed to show respect to the sage Agastya. Even as an elephant he continued to gather flowers for the worship of Vishṇu. Vishṇu therefore was ready to rescue him from the crocodile, which had been one Huhu, a Gandharva.

[2] The snake was Sumukha, afraid of Garuḍa, the sacred kite which was Vishṇu's vehicle. Garuḍa had eaten his father, and was shortly going to eat Sumukha. Vishṇu put Garuḍa to shame by making him carry Sumukha on his shoulders. Yama is the god of death.

6. The son of that great sage who learnéd was
In the eternal Vedas four,[1]
Feared cruel Yama who esteemed him not,
And thy protection claimed: thou wast
His refuge, nor didst leave him after thou
Hadst raged at Kāla merciless.
That the great grace thou further purposed him
—Never to leave thy sacred feet—
May also come to me, thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

7. A Brahmin who aforetime gave to thee[2]
The Truth for repetition, and
The birth of sacred thread, besought of thee:
'I know not where my darling son
Is hidden. Thou dost know. Oh, give him me!'
Thou with thy flawless truth didst cure
The lack for which he prayed to thee—didst give
Him back his little one. And so
I come; the refuge of thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

8. A Brahmin, adept in the Vedic truth,[3]
Called on thee: 'Sire, I seek thy feet.
My wife her children dear has never seen
Since they were born; a cruel god

[1] Mārkaṇḍeya, the child of the old age of Mṛikaṇḍa, the sage, was to be perfectly virtuous, and die at the age of 16, rather than live an evil life to the age of 100. By doing penance to Śiva he was able to evade the resolute efforts of Yama to capture him. He was further given the gift of eternal life. 'Kāla' is either Yama himself or his attendant, the minister of death. (Note that a story usually associated with Śiva is by the Āḷvār assigned to Vishṇu.)

[2] The Brahmin Santhipini taught Kṛishṇa after the killing of Kaṁsa, and made this request as for his fee. His son had been drowned twelve years before. Kṛishṇa sought him out and restored him to his father. 'Sacred thread': this ceremony is regarded as a youth's second birth, the entry on the life of manhood.

[3] Three children had so disappeared. At the time of the birth of the fourth, the father appealed to Kṛishṇa, who agreed to save it. He was busy however, and Arjuna acting for him, failed to save the child. Kṛishṇa therefore himself came, and restored all four.

Has taken them and hidden them away.
In presence of his enemies
Thou showedst kindly grace ; didst say to him
'These are thy children,' and didst give
Them back. And so I come ; thy feet I seize,
Lord of Śrīraṅgam with its beauteous trees.

VI

Renunciation

KULASĒKARAN: PERUMĀL TIRUMOḺI: C. 3

1. No kinship with this world have I
Which takes for true the life that is not true.
'For thee alone my passion burns,' I cry,
'Raṅgan,[1] my Lord!'

2. No kinship with this world have I—
With throngs of maidens slim of waist:
With joy and love I rise for one alone, and cry
'Raṅgan, my Lord!'

3. No kinship have I with the devotees
Of Māran[2] with the cruel bow!
But mad for Raṅgan's wreathéd breasts am I,
Nārāyaṇan, Eternal, Hell's dread Foe!

4. No kinship with this world have I,
Rejoicing in its round of food and fine array!
Lo, I am mad for Raṅgan, him whose mouth
Drained through her breasts the ogress' life away.

6. No kinship have I with the men who choose
The evil when the good unmixed is there.
Mad am I for the First, the Cowherd Groom[3]
Of her[4] who sprang from out the lotus fair.

[1] The deity at Śrīraṅgam. [2] Kāma, the Indian Cupid.
[3] Kṛishṇa. [4] Lakshmi.

7. Cast out by red-eyed Vishṇu is the mind
 That clung on every side to every one:
'Father, forsaken are they all, and I
 With love for Raṅgan, for my Lord, fordone.'

9. No harm shall touch the man who mighty stands
 In these the songs the Konkan king[1] has sung—
Great in his lonely frenzy for the feet
 Of Raṅgan with the discus in his hands!

VII

'The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes . . .'

KULASĒKARAN: PERUMĀL TIRUMOḶI: C. 4

1. Flesh-pampering birth in body's not for me
Unless his slave I be,
Who tamed the seven bulls.[2] Oh, as a crane
May I be born again,
Whose home is in Konēri[3] upon Vēṅgaḍam,
Of him who in his left hand holds the conch.

2. The wealth which rules in heaven is not for me,
With galaxy
Of nymphs[4] with charms immortal; on the earth
No kingship! May the birth
That is my lot be as a fish within the springs
Of Tiruvēṅgaḍam, with groves of honeyed flowers!

3. Entrance into Vaikunṭha's[5] portals high
—Hard to be entered by
Him of the thickly matted hair,[6] and Brahm
And Indra,[7] come

[1] Kulasēkaran.
[2] Kṛishṇa won the daughter of the shepherd, Nagnachittu, by taming seven bulls. [3] A small tank on Tirupati hill.
[4] Dancing girls in Indra's heaven, Svarga. [5] Vishṇu's heaven.
[6] Śiva.
[7] Indra is here ranked with Śiva and Brahma: Vishṇu is superior to the triad.

Close pressing—I would gain, holding the golden bowl
For Vēṅgaḍ's king to spit in,[1] lightning discus-armed!

4. Where humming beetles sing their song I'd be
A champak tree,
Standing at Tiruvēṅgaḍam, that I
The feet might spy
Of him, mysterious Lord, who slumbers[2] in the cool
Milk-sea, all tossing with its waves of coral bright!

7. I will not know the wealth men celebrate—
To sit as lord, in state,
O'er kings, 'neath white umbrella like full moon
Which rules the sky. My boon
Be rather thoughts which like Kānāṟu[3] river flow
On hill of Vēṅgaḍam with groves of honeyed flowers.

8. 'Mid Vēṅgaḍam's cool scented groves I'd fain
My stand maintain—
A road upon his hill who—Vēd-revealed—
Himself fulfilled
The penance duly done by him with crescent moon
In matted hair,[4] by Brahma and by Indra![5]

9. O Tirumāl, who banishest strong deeds
That grow like weeds,
O mighty lord of Vēṅgaḍam, that I
Thy coral lips might see, and lie,
A step, at threshold of thy temple, for thy slaves
And heavenly ones, and beauteous nymphs to pass across!

[1] In Vishṇu temples a spittoon is provided for the deity, into which is emptied the ceremonially offered water.

[2] Vishṇu is pictured as at Śrīraṅgam, a recumbent sleeping figure.

[3] A stream on Tirupati hill.

[4] Śiva.

[5] Those who have gained the position of Śiva, etc., by their penances have only done so by the help of the Supreme Being who is revealed in the Veda.

10. If 'neath that canopy which rules above
I might attain the love
Of Urvasi[1] with girdle of fine gold,
To it I'm cold.
Oh to be anything at all on Vēṅgaḍam,
The golden hill of him with lips of coral red!

VIII

'All my hope on Thee is stayed'

KULASĒKARAN: PERUMĀL TIRUMOḺI: C. 5.

1. If Thou wilt not my portion'd grief dispel,
I have no hope but Thee,
Vitṛuvakōḍu's[2] Lord,
Girt with its groves of flowers with fragrant smell.
I'm like a babe, which weeps, yet thinks of mother's grace,
Though she with anger fierce has thrust it from her face.

2. Girt on all sides by walls that heaven touch,
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord,
E'en like a well-born girl
Who only knows her husband, though deeds such
As men may mock her lover does, so will I sing,
Though thou'lt not be my Lord, Thy anklets tinkling.

3. Surrounded by wide lands which fishes see,
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord,
E'en if Thou wilt not look
On me, I have no other hold but Thee—
Like subjects looking to the rod of wreathéd king,
Though he regards them not and works deeds harrowing.

[1] One of the dancing girls in Svarga, widely sung in Indian poetry.
[2] A place in the Chera country.

4. Though by illusion from Thee woe I have
Without a remedy,
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord,
At Thy grace only will I look, Thy slave,
Like a sick man, who, though physician cut with knife
And brand, yet loves him with a love as long as life.

5. Slayer of elephant great and fierce of eye
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord,
Where shall I go and live?
Save for Thy feet, like a great bird am I
Which goes around and sees no shore and comes at last
Back o'er the tossing sea and perches on ship's mast!

6. Though red fire comes itself and makes fierce heat,
The lotus red blooms not
Save for the fierce-rayed one
Who in the lofty heavens has his seat.
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord, though Thou will not remove
My woe, my heart melts not save at Thy boundless love.

7. E'en when forgotten wholly by the sky
The green crops only look,
(Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord!)
At the great black clouds as they rise. So I,
Thy servant, more and more will set my mind on Thee,
Though Thou wilt not remove my human misery.

8. With gathered waters all the streams ashine
Must spread abroad and run
And enter the deep sea
And cannot stand outside. So refuge mine,
Save in the shining bliss of entering Thee, is none,
Vitṛuvakōḍu's Lord, thick cloud-hued, virtuous one!

ĀṆḌĀḶ

(From a wood carving in the Madras Museum)

IX

The Maiden's Vow.

ĀṆḌĀḶ: TIRUPPĀVAI

Introduction

The *Tiruppāvai* is one of the best-known and most used parts of the *Nālāyiṛa Prabandham.* In it the poetess, Āṇḍāḷ, pictures herself as one of the gopis, the milkmaid friends of Kṛishṇa, rising early in the morning, and persuading her friends to accompany her in order to arouse the sleeping Kṛishṇa. Their aim is to secure from him a drum, as a pledge of bliss. (Possibly the drum is intended to suggest the triumph of acknowledged love; if he gives her a drum, it is so far a sign that he has commissioned her to proclaim his praises.) The first five stanzas are a general description of what those who have undertaken this vow of waiting upon Kṛishṇa must do, and of the benefits that will come to them. Stanzas 6 to 15 describe the attempts of those who have already risen to awaken others who are still asleep. In stanzas 16 to 22 all the maidens have gathered together and are trying to rouse Kṛishṇa, wakening first the gatekeeper, then Nandagopa and Yaśōdā, Bālarāma and Kṛishṇa. In 18 they appeal to Nappinnai, or Rādhā, and in 21 all together unite to call Kṛishṇa. In 25 they reply to the question that Kṛishṇa may be imagined to put to them, as to what they want; and in 27 they explain what the benefits are which they expect. In 30 the issue of their desire is stated, and the poetess speaking in her own person promises eternal blessings to those who have made her song their own.

(The refrain at the end of each stanza, 'Ēlōrembāvāy,' is of doubtful meaning, and is best left untranslated. Kingsbury and Phillips (*Hymns of the Tamil Śaivite Saints*, p.101) also leave it untranslated, and suggest the meaning ' Receive and ponder what I say, O Lady.' Among other suggestions is 'Hail, O thou unique lady!')

TRANSLATION

1\. Now 'tis the fair full moon of Mārgaḷi,[1]
Will ye go bathe, ye girls all fitly dight,
Ye maidens rich of plenteous Āypāḍi[2]
Bent on your vow? For all the world to praise,
He, son of Nandagōpāl[3] with sharp sword
Fierce toiling; fair-eyed Yaśōd's[4] lion-whelp:
He with the body dark and eyes of red,[5]
With face like to the rays of sun and moon:
Nārāyaṇan,[6]—he freely[7] will on us
The drum bestow. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

2\. Harken, ye happy dwellers in the world,
The deeds that we must do to keep our vow,
Singing the feet of him, the Lord supreme,
Who sleeps upon the hooded snake[8] within
The sea of milk. Bathing at break of day
Nor ghi nor milk we'll eat; we will not paint
Our eyes with black;[9] flowers shall not deck our hair;
No deeds unfit we'll do; no evil words
We'll speak, but give kind alms, and muse with joy
Upon this way. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

3\. If as we sing the name of him supreme
Who measuréd the mighty world,[10] we bathe,
And say 'tis for our vow; three rains each month
Will fall throughout the land, and bring no harm,
While *kayal* fishes leap amid the great
Red swelling grain,[11] and in the lily bud
The lovely bees shall slumber. Generous,
Great cows shall flood the bowls with milk, as soon
As we their udders press; unfailing wealth
Shall fill the land. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

[1] The month of December-January.
[2] Gōkula, the home of Kṛishṇa's foster-parents.
[3] Kṛishṇa's foster-father.
[4] Yaśōdā, Kṛishṇa's foster-mother.
[5] Red is the colour that shows passion, especially warm affection.
[6] The Supreme Being, with whom Vishṇu and Krishṇa are identified.
[7] i.e., of his own accord.
[8] Ādiśēsha: see Introduction, p. 22.
[9] Khol, frequently used to heighten the beauty of the eyes.
[10] In the Vāmana avatāra.
[11] There is such plentiful irrigation.

4. Great as the sea, O Lord of rain, stint nought:
Enter the deep and drink and fill thyself;
Then rise on high, with body growing black
Like to the form of the Primeval One;[1]
Flashing like disc in Padmanābhan's[2] hand—
His, of the fair broad shoulders!—like the conch[3]
Thundering, rain on earth like pelting darts
Shot from relentless Śārṅgam,[4] so that it
May prosper, and we too, who happy bathe
In Mārgaḻi. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

5. When thus all pure we come, strewing fair flowers,
Adoring, and with songs upon our lips,
And meditating in our hearts on him—
Māyan,[5] the child of Northern Mathurā:[6]
The Ruler of great Jumna's sacred stream:[7]
The shining lamp which in the shepherd caste
Appeared:[8] Dāmōdaran,[9] who brightly lit
His mother's womb[10]—faults past and faults to come
Cease, like to cotton that within the fire
Flames into dust. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

6. Lo, birds are singing! and hast thou not heard?—
Heard the white shell's deep sounding in the shrine
Of the Bird's Lord?[11] Child, wilt thou not arise?
Sages and *Yogis* (holding in their hearts

[1] Nārāyaṇa as the creator of all in the beginning.
[2] Vishṇu as the lotus-navelled. See Introduction, p. 22.
[3] One of Vishṇu's weapons. [4] Vishṇu's bow.
[5] The Mysterious One, sometimes appearing in ordinary form, as the child Kṛishṇa, etc., sometimes revealing himself as the Supreme Being. (See p. 54, note 2.)
[6] Literally 'lasting Northern Mathurā'—'lasting' because Kṛishṇa's birthplace.
[7] Mathurā and Gōkula, where Kṛishṇa's boyhood was spent, are both on the river Jumna.
[8] The fact that Kṛishṇa was brought up among the shepherds conferred great distinction on their caste.
[9] A name of Kṛishṇa, because as a child he was tied by a cord round his waist to keep him out of mischief.
[10] It was a glory for her to have such a child.
[11] Vishṇu, whose vehicle is the great kite, Garuḍa.

Him who drained poison from the she-ghoul's breast[1]
Lifted his foot and so false Sakadam[2]
Confounded and destroyed—who takes his rest
Upon the serpent in the Flood[3]) have risen
Meekly, and in their hearts rejoice at sound
Of Hari's[4] name. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

7. Hast thou not heard the twittering everywhere,
And sound of Ānaichāttan's[5] mingling voice,
O simple maid? Hast thou not heard the sound
Of churning buttermilk, while dairymaids
With fragrant hair their tinkling necklets toss
From side to side?[6] Child, of the maidens queen,
Still dost thou lie, when thou hast heard the song
To him, Nārāyaṇan? to Kēśavan?[7]
Oh, thou who mistress of the country art,
Open, I pray! Ah! Ēlōrembāvāy!

9. Cousin, on drowsy cushions fast asleep,
In brightly jewelled hall, with lamp alight
And incense rising—now unloose the bars
Of thy bejewelled doors! O aunt of mine!
Wilt thou not rouse her? is thy daughter dumb?
Or is she deaf? Is it a slumber light,
Or through some incantation does she lie
In the deep sleep of stupor, while aloud
We cry great Māyan, Māthavan, Vaikunṭh,
The many names?[8] Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

11. Thou golden tendril of the blameless herds,
Who many a time did milk the youngling cows

[1] Kṛishṇa as a baby drained the life from the breast of Pūtana, who came to poison him with her milk, sent by Kaṁsa.
[2] The demon who entered into the wheel of a cart under which the infant Kṛishṇa was lying, with a view to crush him.
[3] Vishṇu reposing upon Ādiśēsha in the Sea of Milk.
[4] Hari is Vishṇu. [5] A bird.
[6] The setting of Kṛishṇa's early life is among farm activities.
[7] A name of Vishṇu: either 'the beautiful one with thick hair,' or 'the slayer of the demon, Kēśi.'
[8] Vishṇu has 1,000 names. For Māyan see p. 51, note 2. Māthavan, lord of the damsel, i.e., Lakshmi. Vaikunṭha is Vishṇu's heaven. The repetition of the thousand names is practised by devotees.

And mighty were in fight to bring to nought
The power of foes! Fair as a serpent, thou,—
Bright as the peacock, come! From every side
All thy girl friends are come and crowd thy courts
To sing the name of the cloud-coloured One[1] . . .
Ah, wealthy lady, still thou stirrest not,
Still speakest not? What is the value of
This sleep of thine? Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

12. O little sister of the wealthy lord
Of lowing milch-cows, yearning for their calves
So that the milk from out their udders flows
Till all the house is drenched and turned to mud:[2]
Dew falling on our heads, we at thy gate
Sing our heart's darling, who in anger slew
The Lord of Laṅkā in the South;[3] but thou
Remainest dumb; e'en still thou dost not rise.
What a great sleep is this, when all among
The household know! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

14. Lo, how within your garden pool behind,
The water-lily blossoms red, and how
The āmbal[4] shrinks! Ascetics, in their robes
Of saffron, and with teeth all white,[5] have gone
To sound the conch within their sacred shrine.
O lady, who didst promise that betimes
Thou wouldst rouse *us*, thyself art not yet risen.
Shameless, all tongue! We sing to him who wields
In his great hands the conch and discus, him
Lotus-eyed! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

15. 'Young parrot,[6] dearest, art thou sleeping yet?'
'Be still! Call me no more, ye girls; I come.'

[1] Kṛishṇa is always pictured as dark in colour.
[2] A picture of overflowing plenty.
[3] Rāma, who slew Rāvaṇa, Lord of Laṅkā (Ceylon).
[4] A flower that opens in the dark and closes in the light.
[5] Ascetics do not chew betel, etc., and their teeth are therefore not discoloured; a token of their purity.
[6] A term of endearment.

'Thy promises and thy sharp tongue we know
Of old!' 'Sharp-tongued yourselves, oh let me be!'
'Oh quickly come! What other claims hast thou?'
'But have *all* come?' 'Come? yes; thou too must
come
And count thyself among our band, and sing
Him who the mighty one[1] did slay, himself
Mighty to bring to nought his doughty foes,
Mysterious Lord![2] Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

16. Warden of our lord Nandagōpan's house,
Guard of the gate all decked with streaming flags,
Open the jewelled portals! Yesterday
The Lord of Mystery, like to a gem,[3]
Promised a drum for us young shepherd girls
To beat—We in our purity have come
That we may sing to rouse him from his sleep.
Deny us not our purpose with thy word,
But oh, do thou, we pray thee, open now
The well-barred door! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

17. O Nandagōpan, lord who graciously
Dost raiment, water, rice, bestow on us,
Arise! And thou, our lady, Yaśōdā,
Queen among all the slender-waisted ones,
And glory of our tribe, arise! Sleep not!
Awake, awake, King of the gods,[4] who pierced
The sky, and, swelling, measured out the world;[5]
Arise! And dear lad, Bāladēva,[6] thou
With golden anklets on thy feet, asleep,
And thy young brother![7] Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

[1] The reference is to Kṛishṇa's slaying of the elephant stationed by Kaṁsa at the gate of the tournament enclosure to kill him when he came to destroy Kaṁsa.

[2] The personal noun from Māya, which in the Viśishṭādvaita philosophy is equivalent to 'matter,' from the way in which it deceives. It is also frequently used in the sense of 'mystery.' It is to be distinguished from the sense of 'illusion' in which Śaṅkarāchārya uses it.

[3] Kṛishṇa, the sapphire-coloured.

[4] Vishṇu is supreme over all the gods.

[5] Vishṇu in the Vāmana avatāra—See Introduction, pp. 22, 25.

[6] Bālarāma, Kṛishṇa's elder brother, himself a semi-incarnation of Vishṇu. [7] Kṛishṇa.

18. Daughter[1] of Nandagōpāl, who is like
A lusty elephant, who fleeth not,
With shoulders strong: Nappinnāi,[2] thou with hair
Diffusing fragrance, open thou the door!
Come see how eveywhere the cocks are crowing,
And in the *māthavi*[3] bower the Kuyil[4] sweet
Repeats its song.—Thou with a ball in hand,[5]
Come, gaily open, with thy lotus hands
And tinkling bangles fair, that we may sing
Thy cousin's name![6] Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

20. Thou who art strong to make them brave in fight,[7]
Going before the three and thirty gods,
Awake from out thy sleep! Thou who art just,
Thou who art mighty, thou, O faultless one,
Who burnest up thy foes, awake from sleep!
O Lady Nappinnāi, with tender breasts
Like unto little cups, with lips of red
And slender waist, Lakshmi, awake from sleep!
Proffer thy bridegroom fans and mirrors now,
And let us bathe! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

21. Son of the mighty lord of fruitful cows
Which milk unceasing pour, so that the bowls
Held to receive it froth and overflow:
Thou who possessest knowledge, Lord of Strength,
Thou great one, thou the sun, where in this world
Thou standest visible:[8] arise from sleep!
As foes, whose strength before thee all is gone,
Come humbly to thy gates, and at thy feet
Obeisance do, so we to adore thee come,
And sing our praise! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

[1] Literally 'daughter-in-law.'
[2] 'The one with beautiful hair'—Rādhā, Kṛishṇa's gopi devotee. She is regarded as an incarnation of Vishṇu's consort, Nīḷa-Dēvi, as he himself is of Vishṇu.
[3] A flowering creeper. [4] The Indian hawk-cuckoo.
[5] Because she was playing with Kṛishṇa.
[6] She was having a playful quarrel with Kṛishṇa, and they offer to take her side in song, if she will open to them.
[7] In the event of any conflict between gods and demons.
[8] Kṛishṇa, as foster-son of Nandagōpāl, is here apostrophised and identified with the Supreme Being.

22. Like monarchs of the beautiful great world
Who come with broken pride up to thy couch
In a great company, we crowd to thee!
Little by little will not thy red[1] eyes
Open upon us—like to lotus flowers
Fashioned on tinkling anklets? If on us
Thou wilt but glance, with both thy beauteous eyes
Like to the rising of the moon and sun,
The curse that rests upon us is removed—
If thou but glance! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

23. As a fierce lion, which throughout the rains
Within his mountain lair has lain asleep,
Awakes, and flashes fire from his eye,
And angrily with bristling mane he moves
All of his body, shakes himself and stands
Upright, and roars, and lordly issues forth:
So thou who flowerlike art, come graciously
Forth from thy shrine; in grace, upon thy throne[2]
Of cunning craftsmanship, search out the cause
That brings us here. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

25. Thou, born one woman's son, and in one night
Conceal'd and rearéd as another's child,[3]
Thou mighty Māl[4] who wast as very fire
In Kaṁsa's heart stirred unendurably;
Thwarting the evil purpose that he plann'd:
With longing after thee we've come, and if
The drum thou but bestow, then we will sing
Thy bounty, that is worthy Lakshmi's self,
Sing too thy might; and all our trouble gone
We will rejoice! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

27. Gōvinda[5], whose nobility is such
As conquers e'en thy foes, by singing thee

[1] See p. 50, note 5.
[2] In the original there is a play on words, 'throne' being literally 'lion-seat.'
[3] Kṛishṇa born to Devaki and transferred the same night to Yaśōdā to escape the fury of Kaṁsa, his uncle. [4] Vishṇu.
[5] A favourite name for Kṛishṇa—'Cowherd.'

With the drum, what is the glory that we gain
By the prize that all the country deems a boon?
Many a jewel we put on—bracelets
Wristlets and armlets, flowerlike ornaments
For ears, and anklets; beauteous robes we wear.
Thereafter, plenteous meals of rice with milk,
And elbow-deep in *ghī*!—In company
With thee, what bliss! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

28. After the cows we to the jungle go
And eat there—cowherds knowing nought are we,
And yet how great the boon we have, that thou
Wast born among us! Thou who lackest nought,
Gōvinda, kinship that we have with thee
Here in this place can never cease!—If through
Our love we call thee baby names, in grace
Do not be wroth, for we,—like children,—we
Know nought—O Lord, wilt thou not grant to us
The drum we ask? Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

29. Dost ask the boon for which at earliest dawn
We come to give obeisance and to praise
Thy golden lotus feet? It is not fit that thou
—Born in the tribe that lives by herding cows—
Withdraw, rejecting us who fain would serve.
To gain the drum, not for today alone
Have we become thy slaves; but, Gōvinda,
For aye, for sevenfold births! Only to thee
We'll service give; from us do thou remove
All other loves. Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

30. To Māthavan who churned the navied deep,[1]
To Kēsavan,[2] the moon-faced jewelled maids
Went and obeisance did, and gained their drum!
This wreath, these thirty (sung in classic verse[3]
By Gōḍai,[4] Puduvai[5] Pattarpiran's,[6]

[1] See Introduction, p. 22. By churning, Vishṇu obtained Lakshmi.
[2] See p. 52, note 7.
[3] Literally 'Saṅgam Tamil,' i.e., Tamil such as is approved by this academy: probably the famous Madura academy, the board which exercised a kind of literary autocracy, recurringly, throughout the classical period of Tamil literature. [4] Āṇḍāḷ.
[5] Śrīvilliputtūr, Āṇḍāḷ's home. See Introduction, p. 14 f.
[6] Or Periyāḻvār, Āṇḍāḷ's reputed father.

With cool fresh lotus garlands) they who say
Unfailing, everywhere[1] shall gain from Māl
(His arms like mountains four, his face kind-eyed,
And wealthy Lakshmi by him) sacred grace,
And bliss enjoy! Ah, Ēlōrembāvāy!

X

NAMMĀḺVĀR

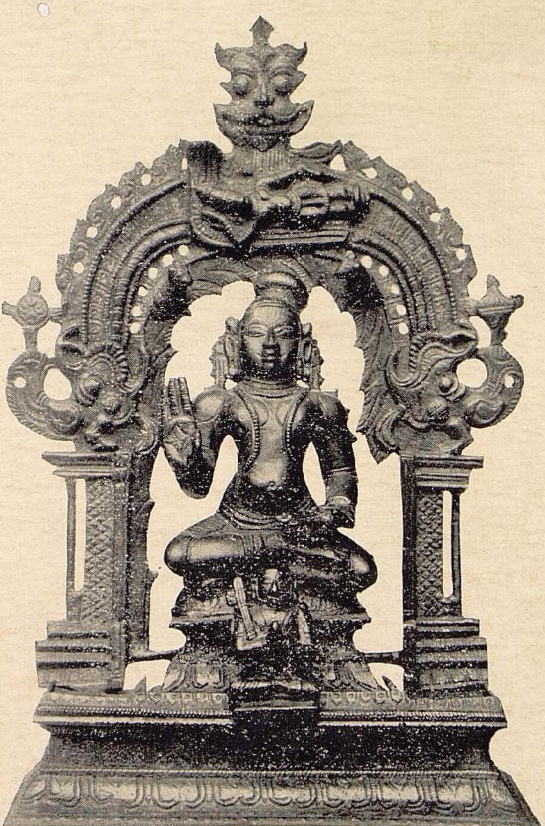
Introduction

Exigencies of space make it impossible to give any selection from the *Tiruvāymoḻi*; and the *Tiruviruttam* must therefore stand as the representative in this selection of poems of the work of Nammāḻvār.[2] It would be easy to illustrate his wholehearted devotion. In one place he sings

'If thus I speak, it means hostility;
Yet speak I will, so hark to me!
While he, my lord, my elephant, my sire,
Is here, of Vēṅgaḍam, with choir
Of buzzing beetles, ne'er to *man* shall be
The gift of my lips' minstrelsy.'[3]

He refuses to degrade his God-given gift in order to please men, however powerful or wealthy they may be. Elsewhere we find his sublime confidence in the absolute supremacy of the Vishṇu whom he sings: 'If with your sweet songs you praise each his own favourite god, all will come to my Tirumāl, with his crown of bright-shining rays.'[4] In another series of stanzas, after enumerating many ways of trying to name Kṛishṇa, he asks, 'Am I to speak of my lord of mystery, who for the joy of deliverance created all the worlds, who wears his sweet blossoming tuḷasī for the worlds to praise, as the one with colour like a shining jewel, or as him who wears matted hair and the cool crescent moon (Śiva), ever to be praised as the unique One, or as the four-faced god (Brahmā)?'[5] Whatever the form, Vishṇu, Śiva, or Brahmā, the object of worship is

[1] i.e., in every birth.
[2] See Introduction, p. 13.
[3] *Tiruvāymoḻi* iii, 9 : 1.
[4] ibid., iii, 9 : 6.
[5] ibid., iii, 4 : 8



NAMMĀḺVĀR, WITH MATHURAKAVI AT HIS FEET

(From a bronze in the Madras Museum)

one. And again, 'Even those who have forsaken their homes and the many beauties they have long enjoyed, who have subdued the five senses, and have tortured the body—though they gain Svarga as their sweet abode, if they are without him, they will return. Draw near the feet of the Lord who has the bird (Garuḍa) as his standard: then there is no return.'[1]

The *Tiruviruttam* of Nammāḻvār is said to contain the quintessence of the *Ṛig Veda*. In form it is a poem of one hundred four-line stanzas, in which the Āḻvār expresses the longing of his soul for union with God, under the figure of the love of a maid for a man. The persons of the poem are not consistently maintained. In general the 'lord' represents the god Vishṇu, and the Āḻvār pictures his own yearning as that of the mistress for her absent lover, with his attendant devotees playing the part of the confidential maid, and sometimes of the foster-mother go-between. In some stanzas, however, the parts are changed, and the Āḻvār's longings find expression in the words of the lover speaking of his mistress. There is no consecutive action in the poem, and no progress of thought; but we must imagine the lover as coming and going in the intervals of the verse. Sometimes the poet seems almost to forget his figure, and to speak in his own person (e.g., stanza 48). The language of the original is close-packed and frequently obscure and ambiguous. An attempt has been made to provide a running analysis, and some hints as to the esoteric meaning; but nothing can make it easy reading. The Tamil student himself requires pages of commentary on each stanza.

The note of the *Tiruviruttam* is one of almost unrelieved yearning for God, that is at first sight difficult to reconcile with the doctrine of His grace. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Book x, chapter 32) Kṛishṇa justifies this, in words which may be taken as a commentary on this poem: 'I do not attach myself to those who are devoted to me, in order to make their devotion to me the more intense.' And again, 'In order to intensify your affection for me I disappear, forsaking you who have for my sake renounced your sense of right and wrong, your relatives and your duty.'

[1] *Tiruvāymoḻi* iv, 1 : 9.

The object of the Āḷvār's desire is the god Vishṇu, especially as manifested in the great Venkatēśvara temple at Tirupati.[1]

(The understanding of sacred erotic poetry is simplified if the generally-accepted esoteric meaning of recurring symbols is held in mind. The analysis of the states of the love-sick soul is carried to an extreme. A stanza in Sanskrit says:

'Love carries parted souls through ten successive states: 1. The eye is drawn; 2. The heart is attacked; 3. The will is resolved; 4. Sleep is gone; 5. The frame pales; 6. All is loathed; 7. The soul is mad; 8. It becomes senseless; 9. It swoons; 10. It dies.' Devotees can of course develop the interpretation as far as they wish, and individual interpretations vary; but the following general key may be taken as typical of the esoteric method of interpretation. By the *mother* is meant either the devotee's own state of mental composure, or friends who keep their mental composure. By the *bride* is meant the paroxysm of love for God, and galaxy of God-loved souls. *Female friends* mean the circle of well-wishers. The *bridegroom* is God, and the company of God-loved souls. The *messengers* are holy ones who lead the devotee to God, etc. The *beauty of the eye* indicates the perfection of discerning wisdom, which determines aright the proper object of love. The *beauty of the breast* means the development of devotion or holy love, manifested by complete obedience—the *sine qua non* of the soul's enjoying and being enjoyed by God. The *slimness of the waist* denotes freedom from every encumbrance in the shape of ungodly ties. *Beauty of walk* is righteous conduct. *Soft flowing hair*, that adornment of the head which is constituted by ever bowing reverently to God and the godly galaxy. *Beauty of dress* means equipment for the heavenly journey in the shape of firmness of faith. The *bracelet*, the badge of a married woman's chastity, suggests the incompatibility of the existence in the devotee of any object of attachment other than the Lord. *Darkness* stands for ignorance. The *wind, the anril bird*, etc., which are named as causes of pain, are all objects of sense which call to mind the cause of grief to the soul, separated from the Lord, and are thus unbearable so long as that separation lasts. The *length of the night* suggests the impatience of the soul to reach the Lord, and the grief that is accentuated by non-enjoyment of him, at a time specially associated with enjoyment. The *moonlight being unbearable* indicates the pain which the conscious state brings to the devotee when he does not realise God's presence. *Sunshine* is the wisdom which teaches patience and so gives solace. The *roaring of the sea* is the unreasonable rage of those who are sinning in estrangement from God.)[2]

[1] Tirupati, in the Chittoor District, or Tiruvēṅgaḍam, to the devout Vaishṇava is simply 'Tirumalai,' 'the holy hill.' Its temple on the top of the hill, approached by long and toilsome flights of steps, seven miles from Tirupati town, is one of the great places of pilgrimage in India.

[2] For the substance of this note, including the translation from the Sanskrit, I am indebted to MS. notes kindly lent me by M. R. Ry. A. Gōvindāchārya Svāmin, of Mysore.

TIRUVIRUTTAM[1]—TRANSLATION

1. *Invocation: the Āḻvār prays[2] to be delivered from rebirth.*

Be gracious, Lord of all the heavenly ones,[3]
Born in all births[4] to save all lives, and hear
Thy servant's plea. Grant, not again may I
Such nature win as this—my body foul,
Wisdom unsound, and character defiled.[5]

2. *The maid speaks, seeing the state of her mistress, unable to endure separation from her lord, who has left her (Here the maid stands for the Āḻvār's disciples, the mistress for the Āḻvār, the lord for Vishṇu).*

Long may she love, this girl with luring locks,
Who loves the feet[6] that heavenly ones[7] adore,
The feet of Kaṇṇan,[8] dark as rainy clouds:
Her red[9] eyes all abrim with tears of grief,
Like darting Kayal fish[10] in a deep pool.

[1] *Tiruviruttam:* sacred messages from the Āḻvār to God. cf. stanza 1.

[2] The whole poem is the Āḻvār's prayer. cf. stanza 100.

[3] Literally 'the unwinking ones,' i.e., the devas. Here probably used of the *Nityas*. See p. 73, note 2.

[4] The reference is to Vishṇu's avatāras, as fish, tortoise, etc.

[5] In lines 4 and 5 the three bars to salvation are named. Vishṇu is approached as the one means of deliverance from all of them.

[6] The contrast frequently emphasised, between the devotee's head and the lord's feet, suggests that the devotee's highest glory is the service of God.

[7] i.e., the *Nityas*, who have never been in bondage and never needed release.

[8] Kaṇṇan or Kṛishṇa, who is always represented as dark in colour. The word may be a pet diminutive, or it may mean 'he who has eyes' ('like the lotus,' understood).

[9] Red is the colour that shows the passion of love: the English association of 'red with weeping' must be banished.

[10] The comparison of the eye with the fish is frequent, the resemblance being in the swift and gleaming movement of both.

3. *The mistress, unable to endure separation, loses heart and speaks to her maid, doubting if her heart, which has gone after the lord, will ever return to her.*

Will't stay or come again, my lonely heart
(Which has pursued the bird[1] flame-angry, driven
By the lord of tuḷasī,[2] arm'd with fatal wheel,
Whom gods adore!)—The piping cowherds' girl,
Bhūdēvī, Śrī,[3] his shadows, it perceives!

What room is there for the devotee when Vishṇu has the unceasing devotion of his three consorts? The Āḻvār distrusts his own power of devotion when he thinks of theirs.

4. *Plaint of the mistress deserted by her lord, and unable to endure the wind which reminds her of him.*

Wind that art tuḷasī-poisoned, blowing thoughts
Of him who drain'd the traitress demon's breast,[4]
Oh, shame to come and fill with trembling me,—
Me, whom his bird ere now of her one heart
Has reft! No heart for tuḷasī remains.

The wind, which should be comforting, is filled with memories that make it painful—The devotee's heart has already been drawn by the Vedas (v. note 1 *infra*) to make a complete surrender to God and thus the wind is merely whetting an appetite that it cannot satisfy. cf. stanza 5, etc.

[1] 'The bird' is Garuḍa, the vehicle of Vishṇu. This generally symbolises the Veda with its twofold course of learning and discipline. See Introduction, p. 22.

[2] 'The lord of tuḷasī' is Vishṇu. Tuḷasī 'cool and fair' is the small plant venerated in every orthodox Hindu household. It is akin to the 'Basil' of Keats' poem. In poetry it symbolises chastity, and it is distinctively Vishṇu's, as he wears a garland of it.

[3] The three consorts of Vishṇu; in his incarnations one or other of these took appropriate form to be his companion. In this passage Srī or Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, and Bhūdevī, the earth goddess, are fitly named as they are the consorts of Vishṇu himself: 'the piping cowherds' girl,' however, is Nappinnāi (She of the Beautiful Hair), the form that Nīlā took to be the companion of Vishṇu in the Kṛishṇa avatāra.

[4] The infant Kṛishṇa sucked the life out of the demon, Pūtana, who came in the guise of a nurse and offered him her poisoned breast. She was one of the many agents sent by Kaṁsa, to kill Kṛishṇa.

5. *The pity of the maid on seeing her mistress' loss of colour through grief because of the hostile wind.*

Hot in this village now doth blow the breeze
Whose nature coolness is. Hath he, this once,
The rain-cloud hued, his sceptre turned aside
To steal the love-glow from my lady, lorn
For tuḷasī, with wide eyes raining tears?

The character of the wind seems changed because of the absence of the beloved lord; the justice even of God is doubted by a devotee yearning for fuller union.

7. *The mistress is troubled at the coming of the rainy season, which should have brought her lord back to her in fulfilment of his promise.* (*'Mistress' stands for Āḻvār, 'lord' for Vishṇu.*)

Is this the sky in which the strong dark bulls[1]
Pawing the ground till Earth shakes, sweat and fight?
Is this the cool fair time that takes the form
Of Tirumāl,[2] and sounds his harshness who
Is gone? Sinful, I know not what I see.

The clouds of passion confuse the spiritual apprehension and make it impossible to be sure of the signs of the Lord's coming.

9. *The lord speaks of the difficulty of parting from his mistress.* (*'Lord' stands for the Āḻvār's devotees, 'mistress' for the Āḻvār.*)

Ah, who can leave her, like a creeper hung
With glorious flowers, like unto Vishṇu's[3] heaven?
Are these but eyes? Nay, lotus, lilies red,
Wide petals, lined in black, and all abrim
With pearls[4] of white—wide, like a shy deer's eyes.

The devotees having heard the Āḻvār's words and seen the greatness of his devotion are unable to leave him; in his company they feel that they are experiencing the bliss of heaven itself.

[1] The bulls are a figure for rain-clouds.

[2] Tirumāl—the lord of Tiru (or Śrī or Lakshmi), is Vishṇu, whose colour is dark like a cloud.

[3] 'Vishṇu'—in the original this is 'he who wields the strong, beautiful, bright sharp discus.' His heaven is Vaikuṇṭha.

[4] The pearls are of course tears.

11. *The words of the lord on seeing his mistress' eyes fill with tears at the thought of separation.* (*'Lord' stands for devotees, 'mistress' for Āḻvār.*)

Oh rare the vision of today! Thou maid
That givest bliss like Kaṇṇan's heaven, I say
'He that seeks wealth must needs go far'—and lo!
Thy fish-like[1] eyes, large as a hand, with pearls[2]
Ashine, and gold, a ransom for the world!

The hint that his devotees might leave him to seek for other spiritual wealth has brought to light hitherto unsuspected qualities in the Āḻvār.

12. *The mistress parted from her lord laments her inability to endure the separation.* (*'Mistress' stands for Āḻvār, 'lord' for Vishṇu*).

Love's glow is paling, and instead, a dark
And sickly yellow[3] spreading;—and the night
Becomes an age! This is the matchless wealth
My good heart gave me when it yearned and sought
Keen discus-wielding Kaṇṇan's tuḷasī cool!

14. *The lord praises the beauty of the eyes of his mistress.* (*'Lord' stands for the Āḻvār's devotees, 'mistress' for Āḻvār*).

This cleaving lance, this beauteous Sēl[4] . . . they leap
Upon my life, and leave it not: they flash
Lustre of Māṛan's[5] shafts: they 'd match his sky
Whose form gives forth the sapphire's[6] flame. Are these,
These Kayal plump, thine eyes, thou goddess-like?[7]

[1] cf. stanza 2, note. The fish referred to here is the *Kendai*, larger than the *kayal*. Note also that Vishṇu's first incarnation was a fish, for the saving of the world.

[2] 'Pearls'—tears as in stanza 9. She weeps at the thought of parting.

[3] Her jaundiced colour shows her disconsolate state: and night the time when loneliness is most poignantly felt, seems like an eternity of pain. [4] The Sēl is a fish.

[5] Māṛan, the Indian Cupid: Kāma.

[6] Vishṇu is of the blue colour of the sapphire.

[7] The goddess referred to, though not actually named, is Mōhini, the type of seductive beauty.

16. *The mistress parted from her lord marvels at the darkness to her friend. ('Mistress' stauds for Āḻvār, 'lord' for Vishṇu).*

Thou, fair as Kaṇṇan's heaven, when he's away
What ages long it is! He here, a span!
Whether friends stay for many days, or go,
We grieve. Yet, be this spreading darkness blest[1]
In spite of many a cunning trick it has.

Times of conscious communion with God seem all too short, times of separation insufferably long, so that in any case the soul suffers from the vagaries of time.

17. *The mistress gazes at the sea and speaks of the vanished track of the lord's chariot.*

Hail, stormy sea, where, on his serpent couch,
Rests Perumāl,[2] like to a bright black sun
Of sapphire, pouring forth glowing darkness!
Make not a dusk with thy full waves, nor hide
Track of his car who left me in the dark.

18. *The maid speaks in pity for her mistress who is dejected because the rainy season has come and her lord has not returned.*

The sky has gripped the sea and risen: the sea
In turn has taken hold of sky.[3] Is this
That time[4] when ocean seizes Kaṇṇan's earth
And heaven and rises high, or but the time
Of showers? . . . Her tears are flowing like the sea.

[1] Ironical praise.

[2] Perumāl: Vishṇu, who rests always on Ādiśēshan, the primeval serpent on the sea of milk. The sea is a figure for the worldly life which tends to obscure the Āḻvār's thought of his fellow devotees; the track of the car possibly indicates his memory of them.

[3] cf. for the description of the indistinguishability of sea and sky *A Winter's Tale*, III, iii.

[4] i.e., the time of Pralaya, the great deluge that ends an age. 'Is this the complete absorption of the temporal in the eternal, or a more ordinary occasion?'

19. *The foster-mother's lament: the lord has not come, and there is much village scandal.*

E'en when the black clouds rank on rank thus rise
Challenging 'Who of maids will keep her pure?'[1]
Her lord, the swift bird's rider,[2] called her not,
Nor tuḷasī gave! My girl with her few words
The village tongues now rend! Oh, comfort her!

Even when God's grace is so overflowing that it draws meek souls to him, the devotee has received no mark of favour from him. His words have been few, because surely God does not need any persuasion to be gracious.

20. *A foolish attempt is made by means of a devil-driver to rid the mistress of her frenzy; but the devil-driver is dismissed; her frenzy comes from too august a source for such treatment.*

Her pain is from a god exceeding great
—From no slight god who lists to wheedling words![3]
You with the trident,[4] stop! Ye mothers, hark!
Naming his name who swallow'd the seven worlds[5]
Garland her head with fair, cool tuḷasī.

Severance from false gods and their influence is the necessary condition for reaching the bliss of communion with the Supreme Lord.

21. *His friend reminds the lord of his subduing the bulls to show his prowess to his mistress.*

While heavenly ones to wreathe thee held pure flowers,
Sprinkled fresh water, offered incense sweet,
There thou by mystery[6] rare didst go to steal

[1] The implication is that the rainy season is peculiarly fatal to self-control.

[2] Vishṇu rides on Garuḍa as his vehicle.

[3] The minor gods are susceptible to bribery or cajolery or coercion; not so Vishṇu himself.

[4] The devil-driver has a trident.

[5] Vishṇu swallowed the worlds to preserve them at the time of the Flood.

[6] *Māya*, God's incomprehensible greatness and grace; cf. p. 54, note 2.

And eat the butter stored, and dance[1] mid hump'd
Horn'd oxen, for the cowherds' willowy girl.

Even though in heaven God is worshipped by the heavenly hosts, he rejoices to condescend and show his interest in the things that hold men's thought on earth.

24. *The mother laments the absorption of the mistress, unable to endure separation from the lord.* (*'Mistress' stands for the Āḻvār, 'mother' for devotees, 'lord' for Vishṇu.*)

What will befall my girl with bracelets fair
With tearful eyes like gleaming *kayal* big,
Who wanders with a secret pain at heart
For blooms of tuḷasī fresh from the Bird's Lord,
Who with that hill protected flocks in storm? [2]

The devotees are concerned at the utter absorption of the Āḻvār in the thought of Vishṇu.

25. *The words of the mistress, marvelling at the wonders that tuḷasī works.* (*'Mistress' stands for the Āḻvār, lord for Vishṇu.*)

What in this world[3] will tuḷasī not do
(Plant of the king; the king of mighty gods,[4]
Lord of all heavenly ones,[5] our lord!) since it

[1] Kṛishṇa as a youth did what the caste custom of the cowherds demanded by dancing for the bride, Nappinnāi; and no less must be demanded of him now.

[2] Kṛishṇa protected the cowherds from the angry rain of Indra, by holding over them the mountain, Govardhana.

[3] Literally 'fourfold world'—jungle, mountain, cultivated land, sea; there is also a fifth division, referred to in stanza 26, of barren land, without water and shade.

[4] Vishṇu is superior to Brahmā, lord of Satya, who was born from his navel.

[5] Heavenly ones, who are higher than the gods mentioned in I. 2; through their devotion they have secured emancipation. The minor gods, like men, are still in bondage; of these Brahmā is chief. cf. stanza 43, note.

Has loos'd my bracelet[1] and has crooked turn'd
The rod that rules o'er Kaṇṇan's earth and heaven?

The Āḻvār complains of the pain of devotion, leading him to doubt the righteousness of God's universal sway, because his own passion is not being satisfied.

26. *The lord shows his city to his mistress, at the end of a long and weary journey. ('Lord' stands for friends of the Āḻvār, 'mistress' for Āḻvār).*

O golden girl, the barren land[2] is past,
Spat out as refuse when the lord of heat
Chewed dry[3] the lands;[4] Vehka[5] is nigh, of him
Whom heavenly ones adore, their feet on earth:[6]
And there,—sweet groves, wealth for all barrenness!

The Āḻvār is encouraged to persevere through a period of 'dryness' in his soul.

28. *The mistress parted from her lord sorrows at the breeze, which vainly stirs her passion.*

Tuḷasī has stol'n my bracelets: let them go!
But now a breeze[7] stalks feeling for my bloom . . .
Śrīraṅgam's lord (where waves play, so that shells
Are pecked not by the sharp-beaked birds),[8] show grace!
In olden days were ever hearts so sad?

Conscious with a fresh vividness of separation, the Āḻvār wonders if at any time others can have known such agony of unsatisfied yearning for God; he appeals to God by a reference to his grace as manifested in Śrīraṅgam.

[1] The bracelet has slipped off because she has grown thin through the wind that has made her lovesick with the scent of the tuḷasī: Vishṇu is accused of partiality because of his apparent harshness: the tuḷasī upsets all the government of God, from a trifle like a lover's trinket to the universe itself. [2] See note on stanza 25.

[3] The sun with his rays sucks all the goodness from the land.

[4] The fourfold lands—as in stanza 25; every kind of soil.

[5] Vehka, one of the 32 Vishṇu shrines at Conjeeveram.

[6] On earth, i.e., at the shrine. Ordinarily their feet do not touch earth: this shows their humility and the glory of this shrine.

[7] The tuḷasī and the wind are both her enemies again, the one making her thin, the other robbing her of her colour.

[8] The great temple at Śrīraṅgam is on an island in the Kāveri River: the river is so full that the shells on its banks are covered by the water, and thus protected from birds. This is a manifestation of God's grace even to shells.

29. *The mistress speaks with hatred of the swans whom she has asked in vain to take a message to her lord.*

'Lacking an envoy, us she begs to go
Her errands!' and the swans—the base-born birds!—
No message took, gone with their hens[1]—Alas!
Have women's messages no right of way
In the world of Vishṇu, blue and lightning bright?

The Āḻvār tries in vain to reach God through mediators; those he approaches are wrapped up in their own interests and fail to help him.

30. *The mistress pleads with swans and herons to take her message. (The swans having failed her, she now includes a lower order in her appeal.)*

The flying swans and herons I did beg,
Cringing: 'Forget not, ye who first arrive,
If ye behold my heart with Kaṇṇan there[2]
Oh, speak of me, and ask it 'Sir, not yet
Hast thou returned to her? And is it right?'

The Āḻvār finds at last some who are directing their course to God and pleads with them not to forget the need of others; he urges his own crying need as a first claim on them. He suggests that if his devotion brings no enjoyment of God, it will be better for his affection to be withdrawn, that so he may at least be free from the pain of unrequited love.

31. *The mistress laments that the clouds will not take her message.*

The clouds that take their way till lightnings flash
On pinnacles of strong-based Vēṅgaḍam
With lightning back of gold and precious stones,
Refuse me when I ask them bear my word . . .
Would they, if asked, my head beneath their feet?[3]

The messengers having failed him, doubting the propriety of such a message as he has given, he approaches others (clouds) already familiar with the sacred mount of God at Tirupati.

[1] The swans with their mates despise her, as she is alone.
[2] i.e., in heaven: Vaikuṇṭha.
[3] They refuse for mere asking: would they perhaps agree if I put my head under their feet?

32. *The mistress speaks of a resemblance between the clouds and her lord.*

Tell me, ye clouds, how have ye won the means
That ye are thus like Tirumāl's blest form?
Bearing good water for protecting life,[1]
Ye range through all the sky. Such penance,[2] sure,
As makes your bodies ache, has won this grace!

The sight of those who give themselves in service to others lifts up the Āḻvār's heart to God, of whom they remind him.

33. *The friend rebukes the lord, on seeing her mistress inconsolable because of his absence.*

With gracious discus thou thy sceptre wield'st,
And dark deeds perish in broad heaven and earth,
Thou serpent-couch'd! But (whether scorning worth
Of girls, or thinking she's outside thy field,
I know not) thou destroy'st my lady's bloom.

Friends impressed by the effects of unsatisfied yearning in the Āḻvār plead with God to be merciful; as in his own abode he rests on a faithful servant, the serpent, so let him favour his faithful devotee on earth.

34. *The friend seeing her mistress' state of distress speaks to the lord.*

'The rings have spoilt it all!'[3] she pettish cries
And spurns the rings with angry little feet—
Her heart is on a garland set, of cool
Fair tuḻasī, full of thy unfading blooms. . . .
O Māl,[4] I know not what to do for her.

The Āḻvār is impatient of all self-help, finding it useless, and sets his heart resolutely on God's grace alone.

[1] The clouds are dark like Vishṇu's body, and, like Vishṇu, benefit all the world.

[2] The popular belief is that the greater the boon the greater must have been the penance that has won it.

[3] The reference is to a game, similar to the 'He loves me, loves me not' played in England with petals of flowers. Concentric circles are drawn in the sand and then counted, an odd number meaning one thing, an even another. In this case the answer they had given was not auspicious to her.

[4] Vishṇu.

35. *The mistress laments at the evening and the breeze conspiring against her, as if the coming of the darkness were not sufficiently painful.*

That Eve (maid of the western sky, in grief
At parting sun—with milky-mouth'd young moon
Like babe on hip) may snatch all good from those
That love the tuḷasī of Māl who strode
The world, now comes a chill wind searching me!

The Āḻvār, cut off from enjoyment of God at the time associated with enjoyment, is yet further pained by the sight of those outward things which give transient joy to others, but are barriers to enjoying God.

36. *The friend speaks of the callousness of the lord.*

E'en in this age-long time of so-called night
When men must grope, he pities not that she
Stands in her deep immitigable grief
Naming his tuḷasī—Ah, his cruelties,[1]
Who once destroyéd Laṅkā's crowded halls![2]

The friends cannot understand God's failure to relieve the numb grief of the Aḻvār, and speak in criticism of him: the Āḻvār is utterly dependent on him, and is unable to make any personal efforts.

37. *The pity of the mistress' mother at the dangers of the jungle through which her daughter has passed.* ('*Mistress*' *stands for Āḻvār.*)

The jungle traversed by the fawn-eyed girl
With fragile waist, whom sinful I brought forth
After long praise of Kaṇṇan's lotus-feet,[3]
Is full of drumbeats—hunters with bent bows,
Raiders, and murderers, and young warriors swift!

The senses make continual assaults on the Aḻvār in his search after God. His persistent devotion excites the admiration of his followers.

[1] He is cruel in that he allows her none of the many consolations she might have.

[2] Rāma for the sake of Sītā did this—and yet now the Lord seems to ignore his mistress' need.

[3] Penance is the means by which boons to any extent may be won from the gods. Note in stanza 38 the different types of hardship that are suggested, each characteristic of ascetic practice.

38. *The mistress parted from her lord sees a likeness to him in the blue water-lilies.*

Is it by penance, passing by rough ground,
Your stems' strength entering pools, and standing there
For days, that ye have won, blue flowers, the hue
Of sprightly Perumān, who pot-dance danced[1]
And, earth and heaven a-tremble,[2] strode the worlds ?[3]

39. *The mistress sees the revealing of the lord's form everywhere.*

All places, shining like great lotus pools
On a blue mountain broad, to me are but
The beauties of his eye—the lord of earth
Girt by the roaring sea, heaven's lord, the lord
Of other good souls,[4] black-hued lord—and mine!

The devout soul of the Āḻvār sees God in everything.

41. *The mistress speaks in sorrow of the wind that torments her.*

I knew the wind was harsh, but ne'er have seen
A shape or hint of cruelty so great!
Now (while no grace he grants who rides the bird
So that proud demons die) the harsh wind spreads
Scandal abroad—persists in crushing me!

The intensity of the soul's longing for God, increased by everything that gives a transient joy to others, is misunderstood and made the object of derision.

[1] The reference is to Vishṇu's killing of the demon, Bānāsura, in the story of Anirudha. A custom among shepherds, in times of special prosperity, is to dance with rows of pots on their heads and shoulders, and in their hands.

[2] i.e., with awe.

[3] In the Vāmaṇa avatāra.

[4] 'Other good souls,' such as are neither in earth nor in heaven. The word translated 'heaven' refers to a state below the position of the 'other good souls,' who are the fully emancipated ; cf. stanza 43, note 2.

42. *The mistress is absorbed in the beauty of her lord's eyes graciously bent on her.*

Like pools of soft-stemmed lotus, as they lie
A-bloom, on one side, bent by blasts, they shine
—My lord's great eyes—on me, who at the sky
Gazing, bow at his feet, who seems to say
'For my stride, earth and heaven do not suffice!'[1]

The Āḻvār is conscious of God's grace.

43. *The mistress speaks of the beauty of her lord's beatific form.*

Can they who wiser are than heavenly ones,—
Can those of higher grade, or higher still,[2]
The colour of the beauty of my Lord
Compute—like a great mountain black—with eyes
Like lotus red, like lotus hands and feet?

The Āḻvār is led to contemplate God in fuller attributes but confesses that to estimate these is beyond the powers of any created intelligence.

44. *The mistress speaks of the greatness of her lord.*

Sages with wisdom won by virtuous toil
Assert 'His colour, glorious beauty, name,
His form—are such and such.' But all their toil
Has measured not the greatness of my lord:
Their wisdom's light is but a wretched lamp.

Many have tried to sum up God in a formula, but in no one particular have they succeeded, each being limited by his own powers of perception.

45. *The mistress seeks to reassure herself by recalling the help given by the lord in the time of the great flood.*

Peace, timid heart! The boar with lotus eyes
In that time perilous gazed steadily

[1] In the Tri-Vikrama avatāra Vishṇu strode over earth and sky in two strides.

[2] The three grades are:
- (*a*) *Dēvas*—in heaven, but still in bondage, of whom Brahmā is the head.
- (*b*) Emancipated souls.
- (*c*) *Nityas*—those who have never been in bondage.

On us:[1] have others such a bond? Of old
We companied with him. Oh say, can births
That men beset, come near to us again?[2]

The Āḻvār seeks to reassure himself by the thought that he has once been saved and can never lapse from that state of grace.

46. *The mistress mourns because she has lost her heart.*

Vain thought of those who count their heart their own
And guileless,—fain would send it messages!
When mine I sent up to the feet of him
Who cleft the golden-named one's mighty breast,[3]
It left me, and still haunts him stubbornly!

The Āḻvār speaks of his heart set wholly on God.

48. *The mistress is cheered by a good omen and speaks to her friend, who asks her whether her cheerfulness is due to anything her lord had said to her.*

The feeble insect showing in a sore
There goes its way: what knows it of the world?
—Or I of cunning Māl's deceitful words
Which made me, shameless, speak of him? Always
A lizard's chirps have been a valued word![4]

The Āḻvār is reminded in his despondency that the songs he sings are modes of expression for God, who uses even the humblest and most ignorant creatures for his purposes. How can he understand God's words to him, which have inspired his song?

50. *The lord speaks to his charioteer.*

Drive, charioteer, that paleness may not touch
The glowing lustre of the bright-browed girl!
Swiftly our car must reach the mountain[5] where

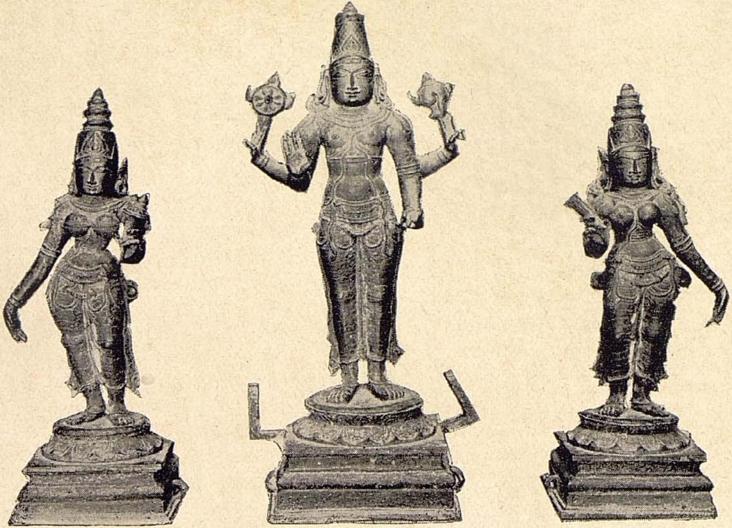
[1] The mistress here identifies herself with one of Vishṇu's consorts, Bhūdēvī, who at the time of the deluge was rescued by Vishṇu in the Boar avatāra. The lord is thus in a special way pledged to her.

[2] The haunting fear of rebirth comes to the front.

[3] cf. stanza 30: Vishṇu in the Narasiṁha avatāra slew the *asura* Hiraṇya 'golden-named'.

[4] The utmost importance is attached to the sounds of the lizard, which are auspicious or inauspicious according to the time, direction, etc., in which they are heard.

[5] Tirupati, the mountain *par excellence* for Śrī-Vaishṇavas.



VISHṆU WITH HIS CONSORTS, ŚRĪDĒVI AND BHŪDĒVI

(From bronzes in the Madras Museum)

Bees hum and streams descend like white pearl wreaths
Upon the lofty crown of heaven's lord.

Friends seeing the Āḻvār's despondency speak to their own minds ('car of the mind,' imagination) to hasten to cheer him.

51. *The mistress laments, unable to bear the sound of the sea.*

The sea, that could not nectar win again,
—Got by the lord of mystery, 'mid tossing waves
With hill for churning-rod, serpent for rope—[1]
Joins with sweet tuḻasī—clamours for its right[2]
In shells[3] which seamen gave me for a price!

The Āḻvār is conscious of the attempts made by those who do not care for God to divert him from his devotion, and to rob him of its fruits. The 'sea' stands for irreligious men, the 'churning rod' for faith, the 'rope' for spiritual eagerness, the 'seamen' for sages who have crossed the dangers of life and are now fixed on the truth, the 'shells' for the purity that comes in their disciples when they pay the price of full obedience.

52. *The friend tries to console the mistress by suggesting that this is not really the rainy season, when her lord is expected again, but that the appearance of it is due to Bhūdēvi's tears.*

When shyly, lotus-lipped with rain-cool eyes,
Call'd by dark ocean,[4] by its white waves led,
Śrī[5] climbed the serpent couch, Bhūdēvi wept:

[1] Vishṇu in the churning of the ocean from which, among other gifts, nectar emerged, used the mountain, Mandaragiri, as churning-rod and the serpent, Vāsuki, as rope.

[2] The sea and the tuḻasī seem alike to be her enemies. 'Right' i.e., like a litigant with a claim for joint ownership.

[3] Shells, which now form her treasured bracelet.

[4] The sea of milk, grown dark because of the colour of Vishṇu who lies on it. Its waves are pictured as hands and fingers.

[5] Śrīdēvi (Lakshmi) and Bhūdēvi are Vishṇu's consorts. Lakshmi was born in the Sea of Milk (at the time of the churning of the ocean) in which lies Ādiśēsha, the serpent on whom Vishṇu reclines. She is therefore at home there, while Bhūdēvi is not. Bhūdēvi therefore weeps for jealousy.

Cried in high heaven 'Cruel Tirumāl!'
While tears rained rivers on those hills, her breasts.

The Āḻvār's friends console him by reminding him that even Earth, who as a goddess might be expected to enjoy God continually, has to suffer the pains of parting, though but for a time.

53. *The prophetess, called in for advice, gives her judgment as to the frenzy of the mistress and its cure.*

The pain of her with girdled breasts is good—
From love of the glory of the heavenly lord!
Fan her with garlands of fair tuḷasī
Divinely cool, or with a leaf of it,
A twig, its root—e'en dust wherein it grows!

In pain of heart that is caused by desire for God cán only be cured by God. The tuḷasī is a figure for the companies of devout souls, contact with any of whom, in however slight a degree, will help to assuage the Āḻvār's grief.

54. *The mistress sends beetles on a message to the lord.*

Beetles, who'll take me to the flowery feet
Of him who stole and ate the *ghī*, and did
Such deeds as men may blame,[1] my lord, and heaven's,
Fly with your whirring wings (easy your way
To heaven!) tell me what ye will say, and go!

The Āḻvār seeks the aid of others who in familiar access to God can intercede for him, and he asks for the solace of knowing what they will say to God on his behalf.

56. *The mistress tells her friend that the lord has visited her.*

By grace of him who swallowed the broad worlds[2]
Safety and bliss we've won! Friend, no more fear!
A cool south wind[3] has come and secretly,
With honey sweet of tuḷasī's fair bloom,
Rain-like[4] caressed my limbs and ornaments.

In union with God the Āḻvār enjoys the consciousness that God also rejoices in him.

[1] The reference is to Kṛishṇa's childhood and youth.
[2] cf. note on stanza 20.
[3] Shy to say directly that he has come, she speaks of a south wind from him. [4] Coolly and bounteously.

57. *The lord excuses his passion by speaking of the beauty of his mistress' eyes, in answer to his friends' criticism.*

Like fighting fish, by creeper kept apart[1]
In lotus-face fair ear-ringed, do they move
And spear-like gaze! No one will blame who saw
Me moved by them that day—like to the sea
Foaming with nectar, churned by Kaṇṇan's hand![2]

Only those who have never had the vision of God can scoff at the devout, and those who see him are themselves converted to a like devotion. (The 'fighting' of the fishes symbolises the conflict within the mind between different interpretations of the vision that the Āḻvār has. They are saved from final inconsistency by the preponderance of some thought which is able to solve all doubts.)

58. *Her friend consoles the mistress by speaking of the greatness of the lord: her case, difficult though it seems to her, is easy for him to solve.*

One foot gauged all the earth: one filled the sky
O'ershadowing all![3] What is there *here* for him
To measure—on high in heaven, the radiant lamp
Of all-pervading wisdom, unsurpassed,
With eyes like lotus blooming in the mire?

Friends console the Āḻvār by reminding him of the manifold greatness of God.

59. *The foster-mother pities the mistress, unable to endure the length of the night.*

This child of sinful me, with well-formed teeth,
Round breasts and rosy mouth, keeps saying 'These
Fair nights eternal are as my desire
For tuḷasī! O Lord of great rich plains
With swelling sea, O Madhusūdana!'[4]

Friends are filled with sympathy at the length of the Āḻvār's 'dark night of the soul.' The teeth symbolise the growing purity of his life, the red lips the ardour of his love.

[1] Her eyes are like fish in their quick and beautiful movement. The creeper that separates them is her nose.
[2] For the churning of the ocean by Vishṇu, see note on stanza 51.
[3] In the Tri-Vikrama avatāra.
[4] Vishṇu slew the demon, Madhu, and is hence called Madhusūdana.

60. *The foster-mother pities the mistress' youth; it is too soon for her to be thinking of a lord; she is love-sick while still but a child.*

Breasts not yet full, and short her tresses soft;
Skirt loose about the waist; with prattling tongue
And innocent eyes:[1] (so that one says 'The world
A price for *these*!'[2])—is't right that she repeats
'Is Vēṅgaḍam the hill of Perumāl?'[3]

The Āḻvār is reminded by his friends that he has not yet reached the state of spiritual maturity which makes possible the full union with God for which he longs.

61. *Her friend consoles the mistress by speaking of the greatness and condescension of the lord.*

How can we speak? Our king is lord of those
In ancient heaven:[4] him all heaven's lords[5] adore:
He in two strides the whole globe measuréd
So that no stick-point's space escaped:[6] 'twas he
Who came to birth among the cowherd folk![7]

It is not for men to presume to criticise God, so great and so gracious in his manifestations.

62. *Her friend speaks to the lord of the mistress' inconsolability and pleads with him to be gracious.*

Howe'er one pleads that she is but a girl,[8]
The black sea pities not but roars on still!
O thou cloud-coloured, serpent-couched, is't meet

[1] All marks of immaturity, though each is beautiful enough in itself.

[2] Contrast stanza 11, where her beauty is spoken of as equal in value to the world. The reference is to her eyes.

[3] She can do nothing but repeat the name of her lord and think of his abode, Tirupati.

[4] i.e., of emancipated souls: cf. p 73, note 2.

[5] Brahmā etc.—minor gods still in bondage.

[6] In the Tri-Vikrama avatāra there was not room even for a thin stick to stand.

[7] In the Kṛishṇa avatāra.

[8] The idea here is not of immaturity as in stanza 60, but of her being a woman and therefore claiming consideration.

For thee to slight her here, who by thy grace
Alone can henceforth keep her chastity?

Those who are worldly (symbolised by the sea) persist in their disturbing clamour, and yet God, who became incarnate to be accessible to man, does not respond to the Āḻvār's cry: he is in danger of being overpowered, and his friends intercede for him.

63. *The mistress speaks to her friend, who has criticised the lord.*

But his red eyes,[1] with gaze so kind that heaven
Is glad, bright like a cool, soft lotus pool,
Enter my heart and kindle there my love
For the fair face of Kaṇṇan, Lakshmi's lord,
And even now abide with me, his slave!

When the Āḻvār hears God criticised he is stirred to recall the grace which he actually enjoys.

64. *The mistress speaks wistfully to her friend of how she finds some solace in uttering the name of her lord during his absence.*

In Vedic hymns earth's gods[2] give worship due
To the sacred feet of him who strode the world.[3]
So I with untamed passion, and in grief
At deeds and self,[4] repeat his sacred name,
Like one who lacking ripe eats fruit unripe.[5]

Deprived of the bliss of perfect union with God, the Āḻvār yet finds consolation in the repetition of his sacred name,

[1] Eyes are red with love: cf. stanza 2, note 9.

[2] i.e., Brāhmans. [3] In the Tri-Vikrama incarnation.

[4] 'In grief at deeds,' i.e., his past karma; 'and self,' i.e., his present birth.

[5] There is perhaps here in line 5 an apologetic reference to the use of Tamil, as contrasted with the Sanskrit of the hymns in 1. 1: cf. stanza 94 (cf. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar, *Early History of Vaishṇavism in South India*, p. 85). Or the reference may be to his own limitations of birth as a Sūdra, making it impossible for him to use the Vedic expressions.

66. *The lord replies to a friend's criticism of his infatuation for his mistress. ('Lord' stands for the Āḻvār's friends, 'mistress' for the Āḻvār.)*

Those lilies red, which are the life of me—[1]
The eyes of her who 's like the heaven of him
Who fire and water is, wind, sky and earth—[2]
So shine that even meditating seers,[3]
Who neither eat nor sleep, must think of them.[4]

The Āḻvār's power of vision of God is so fine that even ascetics habituated by long discipline to disregard objects that appeal to the senses, are compelled to give their admiring attention to him; it is not only his friends who find life in association with him.

69. *Her friend consoles the mistress, who is miserabl[e] at the approach of night.*

The bull of darkness by the red sun-bull
Worsted, is out for victory! Grieve not
If bracelets slip, oh thou with swelling breasts!
Will he who strode the earth, our lofty lord,
Leave thee, this wretched eve, without his grace?

His friends console the Āḻvār, who is grieving for lack of consciou[s] fellowship with God: God's character as shown in the Dwa[...] incarnation is a pledge of his grace.

70. *The mistress laments the length of the night.*

Like days, months, years, and ages—crowding nights
Have come, to make me pale for tuḷasī
—Sweet garland on the head of heaven's lord
With the curved discus! Now to destroy me quite
Comes this one night, a thousand ages long!

In spite of his friends, the Āḻvār cries out impatiently at the leng[th] of time he is cut off from enjoyment of God.

[1] 'Of me'; literally, 'who am bound by sinful actions.'

[2] God pervades all the elements, which form a body for him.

[3] Yogis, who by austerity have gained immunity from the snar[es] of the senses.

[4] The strength even of their mental concentration cannot gua[rd] them from her charms.

71. *The mistress urges her friends to intercede for her with her mother, who suspects her unreasonably.*

I spake not of him as the lord of time,[1]
World-swallowing. Seeing a *kaḷām* fruit I said
'Its colour 's like the sea!' 'Ah, shameless one!'
My mother cried: 'Like the world-swallower
You mean!'—Oh, clear my name to her, my friends!

The Āḻvār wishes his friends to understand that if he has spoken in praise of God's attributes, it is not that he is attaching undue importance to them, or depending on them or his own efforts: he has not forsaken the way of utter dependence on God himself for any other way.

72. *The mistress, unable to endure the darkness, is yet further vexed by the appearance of the moon.*

Oh, let the crescent moon which cleaves the dark
Encompassing of night, cleave me as well!
Ah, does it issue forth in brightness now,
That happy bloom may come to desolate me
Who only long for flowers of tuḷasī?

The vision of what is denied him—the fruit of salvation—adds yet further to the Āḻvār's pain; ignorance itself were bliss to such exasperating knowledge.

74. *The mistress speaks to her friend of her joy at the scent of tuḷasī, betokening the lord's approach.*

A soft south breeze is blowing, that has played
On tuḷasī upon his head who knows
All things, his great eyes closed in sleep,[2] reclined
On breaking waves; the lord who gulped the world:
Who did a mount uproot and hold for shade![3]

The Āḻvār is filled with joy as he receives a fresh reminder of the grace and power of God.

[1] He is not affected by time as everything in this world is.

[2] As in the recumbent form at Śrīraṅgam; or as the babe Kṛishṇa reclining on the leaf of the banyan.

[3] When as Kṛishṇa he protected the cowherds from the wrath of Indra with Mount Govardhana.

75. *The lord expresses his wonder at the beauty of his mistress.* (*'Lord' stands for the Āḻvār's devotees, 'mistress' for the Āḻvār.*)

Ye bright-faced ones,[1] with cruel bow that darts
Arrows like shining fish, to pierce my life:
Is your abode the heaven where dwell the thralls
Of him whose bed's the sea with fragrant waves
That toss curved shells? Or is your home this earth?

The Āḻvār's devotees are amazed at his joy, and wonder whether he is not more than man.

76. *The mistress not having received the garland for which she longs, speaks with loathing of the moonlight.*

Oh, crazy for a wreath of tuḷasī! Heart!
Full of his beauty who, pervading space,
Measured the world! is't strange that the white moon
That shuts the lotus fine and opes the lily
In poison spreads for my white bracelet's sake?

The Āḻvār again grieves because his knowledge of God without union with him brings no satisfaction.

77. *The mistress complains that the pain of evening time is unendurable.*

While her fair moon-child wails, sad Evening[2] stands
Beside the blood-red battle field where fell
Her lord red-sceptred: helped by tuḷasī
(My heavenly lord's, who fought in Southern Laṅkā!)
She tortures me, to snatch away my bloom!

The Āḻvār again complains that at a time when everything conspires to fill him with passionate desire for union with God, he should be left desolate.

78. *The mistress grieves as she thinks of the might of the lord who has parted from her.*

Not mine to sound the mighty power which slew
Tormenting Naraka, and Vāṇan's[3] arms

[1] The Āḻvār and his companions.

[2] Evening is pictured as a widow mourning the loss of her lord the sun, with the moon as her child.

[3] Demons slain by Vishṇu (Vāṇan = Bāṇāśura).

Destroyed! My foolish heart, on tuḷasī bent,
(Worn by my lord who shines like a black hill)
Has gone and left me nothing but this pain!

The Āḻvār could reconcile himself in despair to his present condition, but his heart is beyond his control and thus causes his pain.

79. *The mistress speaks wistfully of the bliss of those who never part from the lord.*

More blest than heavenly ones are they who praise
The Lord who's mighty in the Veda—wears
The sacred thread—whom heavenly ones adore;
Who gulped the world, and over-strode the earth;
Whose cool couch is the snake i' the milky sea!

The Āḻvār covets the unbroken felicity of those who are continually with God, even in this world.

80. *The mistress in her loneliness laments the coming of the darkness.*

Like a great king who rules for his brief day
Of glory, and is dead, the sun is hidden.
O King who strode the earth, thou Lord of heaven,
Unequall'd, though thou'st left me guilefully;
Tormenting night has come. Ah, show thy grace!

The Āḻvār again complains that knowledge without union is torment.

82. *The mistress recalls the beauty of the lord's glance with sorrow as she realises the pain it now causes her.*

Like to the rising on the hill of dawn
Of two red fiery suns at once, his eyes
Even on us[1] blaze down as if again
The giants[2] fell into the burning red!
Can this be he who makes the whole world bloom?

The Āḻvār marvels that the very quality in God which won his devotion now causes him such anguish.

[1] On us, who expect a grateful warmth rather than scorching.

[2] The giants—certain giants fought against the sun, but by means of the worship of the sun by Brahmins, a fire was created into which they fell.

83. *The mistress' friend despairs at sight of her languishing.*

The deep-toned *anṟil*[1] cherishes its mate
Ever before her eyes, in a thorny nest
On the courtyard palm. Ah! as she sobs and lisps
The cloud-hued's names, I know not if she'll live
Or if her frame and spirit mild must pass!

His friends wonder if the Āḻvār can survive lack of conscious communion with God, reminded as he is by common things of the bliss he is losing.

84. *The mistress pleads for sight of her lord, even if she may not be alone with him.*

E'en among groups of beauteous girls, or in
The festivals of the great—or anywhere—
'Tis thee that I would gaze upon, with disc
Of gold and conch all white within thy hand,
Thou dark-hued one, thou Sapphire, Pearl—my Gem!

The Āḻvār prays that if he cannot continue to enjoy personal communion with God he may at least see him, even if it be among others.

85. *The mistress mourns the coming of night.*

Thou who didst stride the world, Gem, Emerald,
Thou Gold well-tried, incomparable One,
At evening when the golden sun has gone,
Fighting the dark—a ruby 'gainst an ape![2]—
Thy slave, my life, thine own, I bring to thee!

The Āḻvār seeks protection from God.

86. *The mistress grieves at her separation from the lord.*

He rescued Hara[3] when he begged with bowl
Unsavoury—skull of Brahmā lotus-sprung!

[1] A bird famed as a type of marital devotion.

[2] The precious sunlight seems at nightfall to have been thrown away for nought in conflict with the darkness.

[3] Śiva, condemned to beg with Brahmā's skull as his begging bowl, was delivered by Vishṇu's grace.

He wields the disc and conch: 'twas he who wept
When his nurse[1] beat him—butter-thief!—one day![2]
How then shall I of him make my complaint?

The Āḷvār comforts himself by recalling God's extraordinary acts of grace to others, and his extraordinary condescension to man's weakness.

87. *The friend rebukes the lord for his neglect of his mistress.*

The parted *anṛil's*[3] mournful note, the roar
O' the foaming sea, flooding the flowery marsh—
—This thing and that, grieving this girl divine
Who sings the virtues of thy mighty bird—
Is this thy work, for all the world to blame?

The Āḷvār's friends are critical of God for leaving his devotee without the consolation of his presence, and allowing him to be tormented by common sights and sounds.

88. *The mistress grieves on being reminded of the lord's form.*

Mount Mēru's like the Lord of Bliss: the sun
On it, the discus blest in his blest hand!
How can sin hinder me, who seeing but
These likenesses of him, lisp of his form
And tokens, with unparalleled desire?

The Āḷvār reassures himself that he must be delivered from sin—the barrier between himself and God—in that, debarred though he is from sight of God, he yet sees symbols of him on every hand, and is thereby stirred to praise him.

89. *The mistress cries impatiently for union with the lord.*

When shall I join my lord, who poison is
For evil deeds, and nectar for the good?[4]
Husband of her who haunts the lotus-bloom,[5]

[1] Literally, 'foster-mother,' i.e., Yaśōdā.
[2] An episode of Kṛishṇa's childhood. [3] cf. stanza 66.
[4] i.e., he destroys the evil (the results of previous activity) and develops the good in his devotee (his present love to God).
[5] Vishṇu's consort is Lakshmi, who springs from the lotus.

Cowherd who thought no scorn to graze the cows:[1]
Who overpaced the world in his two strides![2]

The Āḻvār cannot understand why he is barred from union with God so gracious.

90. *The mistress is unable to endure separation from the lord.*

Lord of the Disc which demons put to flight,
When I review my wond'rous penance wrought
To win a body fit for thee, thy feet
Upon my head, yet see that still no hold
Have I of thee,—time seems eternity!

The Āḻvār considering how all his efforts in previous births have still not brought him to full union with God is filled with dismay as he faces the future.

91. *The mistress asserts her unbroken fidelity to the lord.*

None my heart longs for save the thief who touch'd
And ate the butter in the closepacked hoops—
Him of the belly huge who at a gulp
Swallow'd the world: the trickster who as Dwarf,
Gain'd the three steps great Bali granted him.

Though he has not yet attained full bliss, the Āḻvār can nevertheless give himself to none other than God who showed his grace in sundry incarnations.

94. *The lord's friend, having seen the mistress, apologises to him for having spoken critically to him of his conduct.*

O thou with body black, red-lotus-eyed,
None save the learned seers of pious life
Can touch thy sacred feet e'en with their heads.
'Like village cows, so lows the blind cow too:'
And I have spoken: what else can I say?

The Āḻvār is humble about his own knowledge of God: after all he can only repeat what holy men have said. Possibly there is a reference to the inferiority of Tamil to Sanskrit as a medium for the highest truth. cf. stanza 64, note 5.

[1] In the Kṛishṇa avatāra. [2] In the Vāmaṇa avatāra.

96. *The mistress determines to proclaim her passion for the lord.*

Many a different way of worshipping
And many clashing creeds from different minds,
And in the many creeds their many gods
Thou'st made, spreading abroad thy form! O thou
Matchless, I will proclaim my *love* for thee!

The Āḻvār is resolved to proclaim God everywhere, as the One who in the various sects is partially expressing himself, and who is to be worshipped supremely by the way of love.

97. *The mistress parted from the lord suffers from sleeplessness.*

There's nought but grief for those who've looked and
 looked
At dawn and sunset, age succeeding age—
But can sleep ever come to those who gaze
Joyful with mighty passion rare, at Māl
Eternal, whom adoring gods surround?

There is no real joy for those who give their attention even to the most beautiful things of this world. The Āḻvār, however, in the vision of God finds a joy that banishes even sleep.

98. *The mistress' friend speaks to her comfortingly of the lord's wonderful condescension.*

From sleepless seers and others who adore
He takes away the pain of endless births:
The mystery of the mighty form of him,
Unique and self-dependent—'butter-thief'!—
Hard e'en for gods to grasp that slighting word!

His friends remind the Āḻvār of God's amazing condescension: the one who is beyond all understanding took upon him the form of a mischievous child, even to the extent of stealing. The esoteric meaning of his pilfering baffles even the gods; but at least it shows infinite condescension to man's weakness.

99. *The mistress assures her friend of her constancy.*

If slighting words there be, what matters it?
Nought else that's good have I beheld save him
Who boar-shaped saved the mighty earth from flood,

And wisdom gave to those who dwell where grows
The Karpak tree,[1] to men and all beside.

The Āḻvār asserts again his faith in God, the saviour of the world: his faith is proof against all sneers.

100. *Conclusion, wherein appears the fruit of meditation on this hymn.*

Who scan these hundred flowers, the wreath of words,
The prayer of Māṛan of famed Kurukūr
Whose wreath's the feet of saints who name Māl's
names—
—They in deceptive matter shall not sink
Thick with the mire of deeds that lead to birth!

The poet having laid the tribute of his verse at God's feet says that those who follow what he has said will find deliverance from rebirth.

[1] A tree in Indra's heaven, yielding all that men desire.

APPENDIX I

SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION OF TAMIL LETTERS

Tamil	Sanskrit	English	Pronunciation (approximate)
அ	अ	a	u in punch
ஆ	आ	ā	ā in rather
இ	इ	i	i in sit
ஈ	ई	ī	ī in clique
உ	उ	u	u in full
ஊ	ऊ	ū	ū in rule
எ	—	e	e in fed
ஏ	ए	ē	a in fable
ஐ	ऐ	ai	ai in aisle, but much shorter
ஒ	—	o	o in mobility
ஓ	ओ	ō	ō in noble
ஔ	औ	au	ow in cow

CONSONANTS

N.B.—The Tamil alphabet is not fully phonetic, as are the Sanskrit and the other Dravidian alphabets. Several letters indicate different sounds in different connections.

Letter	1. When mute 2. In the beginning of a word 3. After a hard consonant	After a soft consonant	In other places	Remarks
க்	k (क्)	g (ग्)	h (ह्)	Guttural.
ச்	ch (च्)	j (ज्)	s (स्)	This is pronounced as a *palatal* sibilant.
ட்	ṭ (ट्)	ḍ (ड)	ḍ	Cerebral, far back in the palate.
த்	t (त्)	d (द्)	th	Dental purer than English dentals.
ப்	p (प्)	b (ब्)	p	Labial.
ற்	*t*	*d*	*r*	Hard palatal ṛ peculiar to Tamil as pronounced after a soft consonant.

Tamil	Sanskrit	Transliteration	Pronunciation (approximate)	Remarks
ங்	ङ.	ṅ (before g)	n in singing	Guttural n
ஞ்	ञ्	ñ	n in ginger	Palatal n
ண்	ण्	ṇ	n stopped as far back as possible	Cerebral n
ந் & ன்	न्	n	as in English	
ம்	म्	m	as in English	
ய்	य्	y	as in English	
ர்	र	r	as in English (when soft)	
ல்	ल्	l	as in English	
வ்	व्	v	as in English, but not so firm	
ழ்	—	l̤	r pronounced with the tongue as far back in the throat as possible.	Peculiar to Tamil
ள்	ळ्	ḷ	l pronounced by the palate	Palatal l

Sanskrit words, unless they have become modified by long Tamil usage, are transliterated according to Sanskrit pronunciation, on the system used in other books in this series, the Sanskrit alphabet being represented as follows:—

k	kh	g	gh	ṅ
ch	chh	j	jh	ñ
ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ
t	th	d	dh	n
p	ph	b	bh	m
y	r	l	v	
ś	sh	s	h	
ṛi	ṁ	ḥ		

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